

## A Sermon on Adversity and Hypocrisy

Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for March 29th, 2020 (and beyond)

In this sermon, I'm providing questions aligned with the Socratic Method for self-evaluation to avoid hypocrisy in the face of adversity. I quote from Matthew 23:15 and Jesus said " Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." So, hypocrites are the problem and children of hell according to Jesus. Therefore, if Christian as I am you self-examine to align yourself with Jesus' words in Matthew 7:5 "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." The book of Matthew is one of the primary books from the King James Bible inspiring me personally at this time.

So, if you disagree with someone else that means they disagree with you and a controversy exists as to what is objectively true. If you seek to coercively or through threat of force convert or gain obedience of those you wish to subjugate, then you are not recognizing the equality between yourself and those you wish to subjugate regardless of context. And, in not recognizing or showing mutual respect of the equality of every human being in the eyes of God and the law, you reveal your own hypocrisy. Therefore, when a controversy arises where sufficient evidence exists (preponderance in civil cases and beyond a reasonable doubt in criminal in the USA at law) revealing what is reasonably believed or shown to be true based on objective evidence, official findings are made and a similar approach is taken in areas of science and industry as well. The rest is faith-based and/or controversial as a result of insufficient evidence or ignorance regarding variables not previously considered.

With subjective statements, also known as opinions, you could state that you prefer chocolate to vanilla ice cream. I might prefer Gold Medal Ribbon (BR flavor that is vanilla, chocolate, with caramel swirled) or Mint Chocolate Chip. But, that just shows we have different tastes or preferences and doesn't establish Gold Medal Ribbon is more favorable objectively than Chocolate or any other flavor. It establishes solely that I individually prefer Gold Medal Ribbon and that's my truth. Now, should anyone try to insist that I recognize Chocolate as the best of all the flavors, they are being a bit like Cain in demanding the vegetables be equally liked to Abel's meat offering. And, if God prefers the meat offering as I prefer Gold Medal Ribbon, then I think we should all agree to disagree or just hold our own views where we recognize the matter is controversial or opinion-based/subjective rather than objective in regards to the Truth or Whole Truth or Absolute Truth. The objective truth of the above example is that ice cream exists and comes in many flavors. Those are facts and undeniably so unless you are ignorant or intentionally deceiving yourself or others regarding that reality which many others know to be true and can easily prove with independently sourced data or even take you to a place that sells ice cream with many flavor options so you too can know the facts regarding the existence of ice cream and all the flavor options. But, your flavor preference is subjective and any favorites may be temporary as you explore other options or create your own. So, often we see subjective opinions or preferences that rely on facts

or things in existence as the foundation around which said opinions or preferences are formed or occur. None of that means I'm correct in saying "Gold Medal Ribbon is the best ice cream flavor" as a general statement. Instead, it is more appropriate for me to say, "Gold Medal Ribbon is my preferred or favorite flavor at this time and I'm cool if there's more for me because others prefer something completely different." But, that's because in making a general statement awarding the best flavor title to Gold Medal Ribbon, I'm speaking for everyone on earth in saying it's the best flavor rather than just speaking for myself. Most people understand this much and those that don't may still not get it after reading this should they bother to do so. But, it is my hope the example using ice cream was enjoyable enough as stated and simple enough that if you need to make the point to someone else and weren't sure how that it could be helpful in such a case.

With objective Truth, sometimes agreeing on reliability of sources becomes an issue. You may have a friend you know who exaggerates, lies on occasion, and is a bit more vicious than the others but for some reason you enjoy their company. Now, if that friend tells you something and you repeat it as though it were true, is that reasonable on your part? Do you rely on the word of anyone you know whose word is questionable or has failed to be true upon examination of all available facts with a willingness to consider additional information? And, would you blame the friend for the deception if you repeated it rather than recognize your faith might be unreasonably placed in such a friend and take responsibility for your own willful blindness regarding their faithlessness? If a third-party, to whom you repeated a falsehood you reasonably knew was likely false but you repeated it anyway because you wanted to give your friend the benefit of the doubt even with their track record, didn't believe it and stated such, would the original liar act offended at the disbelief? If they are offended by it in such a scenario or similar scenarios, then the liar is a malignant narcissist. Otherwise, they are self-aware and may even recognize the intelligence of the person who spotted the deception which they will either see as a challenge to win over the intelligent person or a reason to walk away to avoid further scrutiny in most cases.

With adversity, the first person to oppress, assume and/or exercise authority unjustly and in a manner that may at law be viewed as tortious or criminal (i.e. fraud, rape, etc) is objectively most at fault in any dispute or controversy. So, say a vegan tries to convert you to veganism and demonizes you if you refuse to convert. As a matter of law, it is your right to choose your own diet. Morally, it really depends on the particular church, but, being protestant at COPE, I recognize your right to eat what you please with exception to anything involving cannibalism (including eating nonhuman primates because even that's too close IMHO, but, I recognize the argument of necessity for those in areas where bush-meat is the only thing they can actually access to eat to survive or feed their families/villages and find it forgivable in those instances). As long as everything is done in moderation, then you shouldn't be engaging in gluttony which is a deadly sin that expedites your expiration date in most cases. But, say a vegan is dissatisfied and continues to try to convert you through peer pressure, coercion, protest, and out of context statements or claims which when evaluated result in pushing for extinction rather than utility for nonhuman animals. If they are willing to respect your right to choose your own diet and simply share their philosophy while accepting if you

choose not to convert and still associating with you, then not a malignant narcissist and just someone sharing their own philosophy respectfully with willingness to respect your opinion or choices as well. If they are not willing to respect your right to choose your own diet and shun you where unable to convert you, then they are a malignant narcissist in such a case. You may want to ask a vegan in such a case, "How would you like it if I told you that I feel you are threatening my life by suggesting I fail to get B12 which is essential for heart health and brain function and animal products are the only way to get enough B12 since dietary supplements are apocryphal and often don't contain any of what is claimed on the label?" The vegan would need to look it up to come up with a better argument and where that's not possible, they should recognize your right to make your own decisions in that regard and simmer down on their proselytizing.

In other cases though, we see criminals and/or tortfeasors initiate from an oppressive position in seeking to deceive for the sake of personal gain. With frauds, they often falsely claim authority of some sort and discourage or even punish those who engage in critical thinking or ask questions. And, in such cases, when the deception is revealed or recognized by any victims, consumer advocates, the Federal Trade Commission in the USA, and/or clergy, heroes in all sectors including the victims themselves/ourselves speak out against the injustice and hope to both warn the public of specific identified risks while also seeking remedies at law or in the court of public opinion if for any reason the statute of limitations has passed as a result of delayed reporting or failure to spot the con in a timely fashion. But, the deceptive and/or misleading marketing by the frauds is the original sin or first oppressive move. Then, sometimes the frauds will claim that your reporting them is oppressive and makes you a fascist or they threaten you in some way to try to silence you because they do not wish to be held accountable though assume the authority to dictate your actions and choices and therefore are malignant narcissists and/or hypocrites.

Avoiding placing blind faith in anyone or anything while exercising critical thinking and due diligence, is the best defense or best way to avoid being oppressed by false authorities. Recognize your own autonomy and authority in both the eyes of US law and God. And, as a theory, practicing honest reason (including intellectual honesty) for the sake of Truth and all the Virtues (the many names of God in service of the same) is as relevant or supported as using infinity in mathematical equations since no one can prove objectively that infinity exists and can't so prove. <https://www.livescience.com/37077-infinity-existence-debate.html> So, the notion of infinity itself is controversial as is the belief in God. However, mathematicians and scientists use infinity in calculations and people of good faith include God (Truth and Virtue) when calculating or deciding on matters relevant to our lives. But, faith or belief in infinity and/or God is itself controversial. Reasonable people of faith and scientists too, understand it's controversial and are humbled by the reality that some have alternative perspectives regarding the existence of God and/or infinity.

In the event you placed blind faith in anyone and failed to exercise due diligence and self-examine, the sooner you overcome that and recognize the truth the more likely you will be able to seek remedy at law and be more responsible for yourself going forward

hopefully having learned the hard way that due diligence and honest reason really does matter and failure to exercise either results in misery for you and others.

When you feel you've encountered an adversary, ask the following:

1. Am I open to listening to their perspective, reading their materials, or adopting their opinion or point of view?
2. If, for example, a family member is vegan and demands I convert to their lifestyle while not respecting my right to choose my own diet as a matter of law, how disrespected do I feel where mutual respect for my autonomy to choose doesn't appear to be recognized? [In this instance, would communicating I feel disrespected help deescalate or result in some other more authoritarian response which is inappropriate given the equality of the parties in the example?]
3. What if I'm passionate about an idea, philosophy, religion, or movement and wish to convert others? Where is the line?

With the third question above, think about where that line is for you with people who try to convert you to an idea, philosophy, religion, or movement and assume it is likely the same for everyone unless you've joined a cult where you've drunk the Flavor-Aid and are just following orders or parroting talking points from those you've voluntarily given some authority of your life over to for some reason. So, I know when I have a casual conversation with anyone or listen to a lecture from other clergy or educators that where I'm welcome to share my uncensored and topical thoughts too I recognize and respect the speakers and where I'm not that it's likely a cult or a malignant narcissist running the session. I never expect others to adopt my perspective as it is my own and I own it. But, I only respect people who share that perspective on adopting other people's perspectives because otherwise I view it as hypocrisy and the Book of Matthew is pretty clear on that.

If you don't like when anyone else demands you adopt their lifestyle, perspective, or even political views, then remember that even where you think you've got a winner that as with ABC's "Shark Tank" you need to prove the concept and appreciate the response you get because even criticism can help you better your position where it is constructive. So, see someone who criticizes your favorite ideas as simply voicing themselves without investing yourself in any ideas you are not ready to adopt as a result of the criticism. Consider all feedback and exercise due diligence to determine the validity of all new information. And, to the extent you show a willingness to listen to anyone else, if they do not return the favor then they are assuming authority and attempting to oppress or suppress your autonomy to serve their purposes. And, we all deserve better than that and at least mutual respect. To honor Priest John Ball of 14th Century England, recognize social equality.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church/feedback.htm>. For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

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<http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church>

and

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