

Grace for the Cynical & Dutiful

Jonathan K. Dodson | October 23, 2014 | 1 Corinthians 10:1-14

Millennials, people born between early 80s and 2000 are the most cynical generation ever, according to the Pew Foundation. They see through politicians, promises, preachers, commercials. Many of you fall into that category. However there are also a lot of dutiful Christians. People, in the church, who prize Christian duty: going to church, praying, reading the bible, but are cold-hearted toward God. Let's take a look at our text and see how it addresses the cynic and the dutiful.

Responding to Religious Habits

When I walk into a church or a coffeeshop filled with Christians, cheesy banners, and T-shirts that say "I went to Africa, *twice*" a smugness can creep over me, and I have to fight off judging Xns, as if I'm better because I don't use all the lingo, wear t-shirts. Perhaps you've found yourself in a similar spot, cynical about Biblebelt Christians. Cynicism is very different from the Cynics of the Greek world. Diogenes was the founding cynic and actually died in Corinth. He was known for the saying "*Other dogs bite their enemies. I bite my friends for their salvation.*" That cynic took a bite for other's good. But today's cynic just takes a bite...out of politicians, commercials, pop culture, and religion. Cynicism today isn't a philosophy; it is "a voice of doubt in your ear, a predisposition for seeing through people and things, a mood or attitude of suspicion," often tinged with sarcasm. (Keyes) You might say: **The cynic sees through everything and as a result doesn't see anything.** Perhaps you don't have both cynical lenses on, but maybe a monocle? How might a cynic read the Bible? In reading the OT, you might be tempted to see through all the religious activity of Israel as fake. In our opening verses, [Israel is described as "under the cloud" referring to the pillar of cloud and fire that led them through the wilderness, and "baptized into Moses and the sea" referring to their miraculous Red Sea exodus, and "drinking the same spiritual drink"](#), to which the cynic might scoff, "Exactly, that's the problem. Be yourself, be an individual, don't conform." Perhaps you're tempted to conclude they're hollow? After all, we're told they didn't please God and were destroyed in the wilderness. But Paul actually connects their activity to Christ, the one true Jew. In fact, he's symbolically connecting Jewish experiences to Christian rituals: Jewish cloud & sea to Christian baptism, in Moses to in Christ, manna and water to the Lord's supper, the bread and the wine. We often think rituals as negative, but these are positive. Habits reinforce our values. If we value pearly whites (and no cavities), we brush 3xs a day. If we value Christ, we meditate, pray, worship, take communion, serve, give. These are habitual graces but the cynic only flirts with them. He doubts them, keeps them at arms length. **He sees through them and doesn't see Christ.** Now what about the **dutiful** person? Paul's point is that Israel had *habitual advantages and still perished*. Religious habits aren't bad; they actually give you an advantage. But they're not enough. You can participate in these habits faithfully and be far from God. *The dutiful person attends everything except her soul.* Consider the insight of Abraham Kuyper, Prime Minister of the Netherlands: "[Love for God may be fine sentiment. It may be sincere and capable of inspiring holy enthusiasm, while the soul is still stranger to fellowship with the eternal, and ignorant of the secret walk with God.](#)" Here's what he's saying: **You can love the idea of God without loving God himself.** As a preacher and an author I face this challenge regularly. Am I writing out of mere intellectual infatuation with

the ideas of God or preaching, teaching, writing out of infatuation with God himself? I flunk that test more than I'd like to. *A Christ-haunted habit can easily become a hardened duty.* How do we escape?

What the Cynical & Dutiful Share in Common

Paul puts his finger on the pulse of the problem when he writes: "[Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were](#)" (6-7). We are meant to see in (not through) Israel a lesson—that the problem isn't our habits but our cravings. The word "cravings" is a compound word that takes the usual word for desire and adds a prefix to it, rendering it overdesire. Unrestrained desire in the wrong direction. Pregnancy brings on this thing called "cravings." Its an insatiable, overdesire that cant be satisfied by anything else. They just have to have it. When Robie was pregnant with Owen, I went out at 10 o'clock at night to get Taco Bell. There's some debate about these cravings, perhaps they are the way of the body signaling the need for a nutrient. But in some cases, these cravings are for harmful things, called *pica*. Women will crave things like washing detergent, crayons, and even dirt. Overdesire, desire in the wrong direction can be harmful. Israel had an insatiable desire for sex and food. They took God's good things and loved them more than God. They tested and replaced God, and paid the price. What is the **cynic's** craving? Every cynic is disillusioned with the state of things because they know things could be better. Deep down they are hopers, but they cover it up with self-righteous judgment. *They know conservative bigotry should change, but instead of helping in some way, choose to sit in judgment.* They have a craving to be right, which darkens hope. What about the **dutiful** person? Their cravings terminate on Christian habits, ethics, and beliefs. They look across the room and think "Why cant these people just get the right beliefs like me, be faithful in worship like me, have good moral controls on media like me?" They too have an inordinate desire to be right. The cynic and the dutiful, the skeptical and the religious share a common self-righteousness. To both the Lord says: "[let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall](#)" (12). They are both inordinately preoccupied with Self, seeing through others and being better than them, or judging others and being better than them. Both can't get past "me." There's a passage in C.S Lewis' *The Great Divorce* that is insightful here. In it the characters take a bus trip from earth to the foothills of heaven. There in the sprawling plains, just before the heavenly mountain, they are met by angelic creatures called Solid People. As people from earth reach this space they begin to become transparent. In a particular case, an Solid Person is trying to coax a woman who is awfully self aware about becoming transparent. She's concerned it will like having no clothes on, that "people will see right through me." The angel assures here she wont have that sense, that's an earthly thing. Everyone is transparent. She goes on and on, as he tries to coax here out, toward the heavenly country. Finally he says to her, "Will you, for just one minute, stop thinking about yourself? Then you'll be able to step out. We all need to stop thinking about ourselves so much, trying to leverage worthy from one another through seeing through or judging others. You assume you're strong, but you're actually very weak. And until you come to grips with your weakness, you will continue to fall and eventually be devoured by your own desire to be right, to stand on your own, and you'll perish. The good news is *God is faithful.* He always provides a way out of temptation.

The Moving Rock

Let's go back to this idea of the spiritual rock to find our way out with Israel (4). The backstory: Israel demanded Moses give them water to drink, arguing so vehemently that he feared for his life (Ex 17). Moses cries out to God on their behalf. God answers and says, "[I will stand before you on the rock, and you will strike it with your rod, and water will come from the rock.](#)" Moses strikes the rock and water flows. The people drink till their hearts are content. But in the end, they perish in the wilderness. Why? *Because they drank only to quench their thirst.* They were too easily satisfied. Blinded by physical thirst, and fists full of complaints, they missed the Rock. Are you unhappy with your station in life? Do you find yourself thinking if only I had a clearer idea of what's next, or more freedom, more opportunity, then I'd be satisfied? Has your unhappiness turned to cynicism? Knowing there's more but giving up and just seeing through everything? In your craving to do the right thing, have you neglected the secret walk with God? *Has your physical thirst eclipsed your spiritual thirst?* Your cravings turned to pica? So filled with self-important self-righteousness that we deserve to perish. Paul says judgment is drawing near. It's why we have these stories, "[written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come](#)" (11). The end of the age is an age of judgment and salvation. Judgment for those who lift themselves up, and stand above God, as if God would never disagree with them. God will strike them. But there is a hopeful alternative. Remember the rock? The one Israel missed? Paul tells us Christ was the rock, there all along. Where? Do you remember what God said? "[I will stand there before you on the rock and you will strike it](#)" (Ex 17:6). God in Christ was there, standing before the rock when Moses brought his staff down on it and water sprang forth. Sound familiar? Christ struck by wood for our pride, anger, and discontent, so he can give us life. Judgment falls on Christ so salvation can come to us. We can get out of Egypt by turning to Christ. You don't even have to move. The rock moves with you, as it did with Israel. Later in Numbers 20, a similar incident is recorded. God stand before the rock, it is struck, and water flows. The rock followed them, so to speak. Wherever you are, Christ offers you life, better than the cynic or duty-driven person. He's behind you, before you, around you. Will you turn to the rock? He is here. Waiting. Will you turn to him? Turn your desire to the one who satisfies. And if you lack desire for him altogether, ask him to forgive you for your lack of thirst, and to supply fresh desire for him. Christ alone will satisfy. Get out. Flee your idols. And run to the Rock.