

The Individual Collides With The Established Order

A Restatement of Søren Kierkegaard's Part A of Expositing Matthew 11:6 in Practice in Christianity¹
By Earle Craig

Introduction

Matthew 11:1 And when Jesus finished instructing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and speak in their cities. **11:2** And when John in prison heard about the actions of the Messiah, he sent word to him through his disciples, **11:3** and he said to him,

Are you the one who is coming, or should we wait for another?

11:4 Jesus answered and said to them,

Go and report to John what you hear and see. **11:5** The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them <Isaiah 35:5,6;61:1>. **11:6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

It is the last verse of this passage that Soren Kierkegaard explains in the second major section of his book Practice in Christianity. King Herod Antipas has imprisoned John the Baptist because he offended him when he publicly criticized him for stealing his brother's wife and marrying her. After languishing in prison for much longer than he would like, John is doubting that Jesus is the Messiah. At the beginning of his ministry, John had confidently proclaimed Jesus to be the long expected king of Israel. He had also seen the Spirit of God descend upon him like a dove and heard God's voice from heaven declare, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased," thus giving him even more confidence in Jesus' identity. But he probably believed that his faithfulness to his task of being the forerunner of the Messiah meant that God would protect him from harm. Yet his imprisonment has gone on too long, and he sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he really is the Christ who will free the Jews from all their enemies, including Herod.

Jesus responds by asserting that he is fulfilling the Old Testament messianic predictions of performing miracles and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. And he ends with the statement, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." This is to say that the person who is truly happy and can be assured of having obtained God's acceptance and promise of eternal life is the one who is not irritated and repelled by Jesus as he carries out his role as the Messiah. Jesus hopes that John the Baptist will not reject him while he performs such miracles as raising people from the dead, even though John remains imprisoned, which must currently seem like a contradiction to him.

Kierkegaard in his exposition of Matthew 11:6 describes the dynamics of Jesus' relationship with the religious leaders of his day who are offended by him. He considers the "essential offense" to be that Jesus claims to be God while also being a mortal human being. In other words, if Jesus had claimed be the Messiah but not God, then the Jews would not have been so offended by him. However, I suggest that the primary offense of Jesus was different and that

¹ I derive my restatement from two translations of Kierkegaard's book. The first is Kierkegaard, Søren; Kierkegaard's Writings, XX: Practice in Christianity, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1991, pages 85-92. The second is Kierkegaard, Søren; Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourse Which 'Accompanied' It, translated with an introduction and notes by Walter Lowrie, D.D., Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, a reprint of an edition by Oxford University Press, London, 1944, pages 86-93.

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probably most Jews were neither surprised nor offended by Jesus' claim to be God. The author of Hebrews says regarding the Messiah—

1:4 [He is] far superior to the *angeloi*, inasmuch as he has inherited a greater name than they. 1:5 Because to which of the *angeloi* did He ever say,

You are My Son; today I have given birth to you <Psalm 2:7>;

And again,

I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to Me <2 Samuel 7:14>.

The author of Hebrews is referring to the *angeloi* of Yahweh, the theophanies in the Old Testament where God as an uncreated being manifested Himself within the creation. For example, God appeared as a man to Abraham in Genesis 18:1ff.

Genesis 18:1 Now the LORD [Yahweh] appeared to [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said,

“My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by.”

The author of Hebrews is stating that Jesus as a man who is God is greater in his role than the man who was God who appeared to Abraham. Therefore, as students of the Old Testament, the Jews of Jesus' day would not have been offended at God's appearing as a man and even claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God. If the man of Genesis 18, who appeared for a brief time, was God, certainly the Messiah, who would rule over all mankind for eternity, can be God. So how did Jesus offend the Jewish leadership? The clue is in Mark's gospel and the story of Pilate's interrogating Jesus,

15:6 Now, at the feast [of the Passover, Pilate] used to release for [the Jews] one prisoner whom they requested. 15:7 The man Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. 15:8 And the crowd went up and began asking for him to do just as he was accustomed to do for them. 15:9 And Pilate answered them, saying,

Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?

15:10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed him over out of envy.

It is these last three words “out of envy” that are the key. Imagine that you are a member of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem and have studied all the Old Testament passages that explain the coming Messiah, who will uphold all God's instructions to the Jews and free them from their enemies, establishing his kingdom over them and the whole world. And imagine that you are confident that you are obeying the Old Testament as well as any Jew can, and, therefore, God is highly pleased with you. Then along comes a man who claims to be the Messiah. But instead of coming to Jerusalem to pick his closest assistants from among the ruling class called the Sanhedrin, i.e., the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes of whom you are a respected member, he goes to the backwoods area of Galilee and chooses fishermen, a hated tax collector, a former insurrectionist, and other no names from the common people. Would you not be incensed and offended—and confident that he is a charlatan? In addition, this pretender is performing miracles—healing the blind, the lame, the mute, the deaf, and the diseased, casting

out demons, and even raising the dead, while also feeding thousands of people with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. And the result is that the crowds of Jews, for whom you have responsibility to lead in their worship and obedience of God, are ignoring you and following him. Would you not be more incensed, offended, and even envious? I suggest that this is the “essential offense” of Jesus, and that the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees are so blinded by their envy that the thousands of miracles that God is performing through Jesus to affirm his identity as the Messiah mean nothing to them. Their only goal is to destroy him and regain complete control over the people.

There are three parts to Kierkegaard’s exposition. In Parts B and C, he deals with the “essential offense,” what he refers to as Jesus’ being the “God-man.” In Part A, which is the only part I will restate, he mentions the “essential offense,” but I will mean by it what I described in the previous paragraph, Jesus’ popularity while appropriately distancing himself from the official leaders of Judaism. Kierkegaard mainly focuses in Part A on the “collision” between Jesus and the Jewish culture and their leadership. And he demonstrates that it is not only Jesus who offends religious (and other kinds of) authorities in this collision. It is any individual who is unwilling to subordinate himself to an authority whose emphasis is on external traditions and practices and does not recognize that God’s “truth lies specifically in inwardness.” This is to stay that God begins His assessment of us human beings with our hearts and not with our actions, even though the latter are inextricably tied to our inwardness.²

Kierkegaard’s exposition also includes the important concept of a gadfly, and he borrows this term from Plato’s dialogue *Apology*, in which Socrates defends himself before the court of the people of Athens who have charged him with corrupting the youth of their city. However, Socrates claims,

“It is literally true, even if it sounds rather ludicrous, that God has specially appointed me to this city, as though it were a large thoroughbred horse, which because of its size is lazy and needs to be prodded by a stinging fly, a gadfly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the role of such a fly. And all day long I never stop going here and there to rouse, persuade, and reproach every one of you.”³

No doubt, Jesus was a gadfly in the city of Jerusalem and all the towns and villages he visited in Israel—prodding, persuading, and reproving all the people regarding their lazy, religious practices, which they considered pleasing to God “while their hearts were far from” Him. And Kierkegaard argues that every individual of authentic faith and understanding of biblical truth plays this same role, even though none of us is the Son of God as Jesus was. Nevertheless, this is a vital part of our whole role in the world as Christians—to deny that external practices are the key to what it means to be a human being, and, instead, to assert and demonstrate that the key is a heart that has been changed and shaped by the Spirit of God. This is what Kierkegaard calls “inwardness,” a heart that genuinely submits to God and avoids the temptation to make ourselves God. He explains this concept in Part A, which I will now restate and expand on.

² Jesus clearly states the inwardness of truth in [Matthew 23:25](#) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. [26](#) You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. [27](#) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. [28](#) So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” [NAS95].

³ See Plato, *Apology*, 30 e.

The Exposition of Matthew 11:6 – Part A

There is the possibility of offense that is not related to the “essential offense” of Jesus’ snubbing the Jewish leaders and drawing the crowds away from them. Instead, it is related to Jesus as a simple human being who comes into collision with the established order. And the established order is any group who are led by people that oppose God and the Bible by adopting a set of man-made beliefs, practices, values, and behaviors, and they demand that everyone comply with them.

The Established Order Becomes Offended By The Single Individual

The offense under discussion here is one of which anyone, whether Jesus or a sinful human being, can be the object, if he, the single individual, appears to be unwilling to submit or subordinate himself to the established order. But because the individual is unwilling to do so, it does not mean that this individual claims to be God—as Jesus did. Nevertheless, it is easy to see that, in the eyes of the established order, he seems to make this or a similar claim. He seems to claim that he is more than human. And the established order sits up and takes notice of this individual and asks him, “Do you think that you are smarter and wiser than us, the established order?” It is in this way that the established order protests against the individual and wants to intimidate him and force him to comply, or at least to make him declare that he is more than human. The result is to bring the offense into existence—that the established order is offended by the single individual, which is depicted in the following story.

Matthew 15:1 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying,

15:2 Why do your disciples violate the tradition of the elders, because they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?

15:3 He answered and said to them,

Why do you violate God’s commandment because of your tradition? **15:4** For God said,

Honor your father and mother <Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16>, and

He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him die <Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9>.

15:5 But you say,

Whoever says to his father and mother,

Whatever is mine which could benefit you is *qorban* (קֹרְבָן, δῶρον, Leviticus 1:2, etc.), a gift to God,

15:6 and he is not to honor his father or his mother. Thus, you have annihilated the message of God for the sake of your tradition. **15:7** Hypocrites, Isaiah spoke well from God of you,

15:8 This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. **15:9** As a result, they worship Me in vain, while teaching as Torah the commandments of men <Isaiah 29:13>.

15:10 He called the crowd to him and said to them,

Hear and understand. **15:11** It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.

15:12 Then the disciples came and said to him,

Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard your statement?

15:13 But he answered and said,

Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. **15:14** Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into the pit.

15:15 Peter responded and said to him,

Explain this parable to us.

15:16 Jesus said,

Are you still without understanding? **15:17** Do you not get it that everything which goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is thrown into the latrine? **15:18** But things which come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these defile the man. **15:19** For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witnesses, and slanders. **15:20** These are the things which defile the man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.

Jesus and His Followers Are Equally Offensive As Teachers Of Inwardness

It is self-evident to the person of genuine biblical understanding that Jesus is always the Messiah who fulfills the role of the one and only human being within God's story who is God Himself. But Matthew 15 is an historical situation, so that the offense mentioned here does not pertain to Jesus' being the Messiah or God. And it does not pertain to the "essential offense" of Jesus' choosing commoners as his assistants and his becoming more popular than the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. But here in Part A, Jesus is in the more ordinary sense merely a teacher, a teacher of godliness, of the inwardness of the heart, who, with originality and without any reference to his complete identity as the Messiah and God, emphasizes inwardness in contrast to empty externalism. Indeed, he is a teacher who transforms the primary focus on externalism into the primary focus on inwardness. And this is the collision, a collision that appears again and again in Christendom and Christian history. To put it briefly, it is the collision of authentic Christianity with the false Christianity of the established order (or with any other authority and group who rebel against God and the biblical truth). The Pharisees and scribes are representatives of the established order of Jesus' day, which because of their quibbling about religious practices and their fallacious arguments has become an empty and ungodly external Judaism.

The established order at that time insisted and, indeed, always insists on being the goal of every person's life, of each and every individual, of being more important than any person's own subjective thinking and independent decisions. The established order demands unwavering obedience from everyone. And the moment when an individual is unwilling to subordinate himself to the established order or even questions if it is believing and speaking the truth, yes, charges it with being the very repository of falsehood and lies, so that he declares himself to be in the truth and of the truth, declares that truth lies specifically in the inwardness of the heart and not in external practices, this is when the collision occurs. Naturally, the established order poses the question as the scribes and Pharisees did, "Who does this individual think he is? Does he perhaps think that he is God, or that he has a special relationship with God, or that he is more than an ordinary human being?"

Here then is the offense, and it is easy to see that it has to do with someone's quite possibly claiming to be more than human, to his being superior to all other human beings, whether he actually is, like Jesus, or he is just being arrogant. Nevertheless, there is still plenty of room for this individual to be simply a humble witness to the truth without either his claiming to be the Messiah or his being arrogant. But certainly for many people, they think of Jesus as someone who is not at all like the rest of us ordinary, human beings—that he is higher than us. However, they still would have been offended by him if they had lived during his first appearance on earth. And it still escapes them that the offense in the strictest sense is related to his popularity and not being concerned with having the approval of the ruling class. In this way he is certainly not like other people. Ordinary, sinful human beings seek to be successful in this world so that they can be honored and esteemed by their fellow human beings. However, in spite of his humility and knowing that he is the Messiah and God, Jesus insists on *worship*.

But Jesus' insistence on being worshiped is not the subject of this discussion, even though it is entirely certain that a person can be offended at anyone who appears to be more than human. People are offended by him. Yet, again, this may not be because he is pretending to be more than human or is arrogant. Instead, it is because people are bogged down in the established order and will not tolerate any dissent. Every time a witness to the truth highlights the fact that truth is the inwardness of the heart (and this is the essential activity of the witness to the truth), every time a "genius" internalizes the truth in an original way that differs from the beliefs and practices of the established order, the established order will certainly be offended by him. But the flaw is not in the individual witness to the truth. The flaw is in the established order that has made itself out to be God.

If a person carefully observes human nature, it is easy to see that this is what people do. They treat their beliefs, practices, values, and behaviors as God in opposition to God. For example, this is what the German philosopher Hegel has done by claiming that the conscience and understanding of the single individual operating with "independent self-certainty" is "a form of evil" (see *Rechts-Philosophie*⁴). Why did Hegel do this? Because he had deified the established order. But the more one regards the established order as God, the more one comes to the conclusion that the single individual, who is an independent thinker and who rebels against the established order, must be rather close to imagining that he is God. Very likely it is not that this individual as a sinful human being blasphemously declares that he is God. And if he is a true witness to the truth, he certainly is not going to do so. No, the real blasphemy is the criticism of the individual by the members of the established order who worship it instead of the one, true God. The blasphemy is the established order's claiming that the individual speaks out of hubris and arrogance—as if he were more than human, when he is only trying to point out in humility that the established order is wrong.

The Established Order Ignores Its Origin

But the established order regards itself as God, even if its leaders and followers do not say so explicitly. And this is the lie that they propagate by ignoring their own origin. For example, when a poor person becomes wealthy, he usually makes every possible effort to have his earlier life forgotten. So also with the established order. The established order ironically started with a collision between the single individual and the previous established order, began with the single individual's relationship with God. But now that is to be forgotten, the bridge between its humble beginnings and its current honored status cut down, so that the established order can become its own God by jealously guarding its honored status.⁵

It should come as no surprise that this deification of the established order is a perpetual rebellion, a continual revolt, against God. Not surprisingly, God wants to be involved (and one can hardly blame Him for that). He wants to have a little bit of control over the world's and its institutions' development in regard to their beliefs, practices, values, and behaviors. Thus, He wants to keep the human race

⁴ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, for example 139, 140, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke*.

⁵ Thus Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of being more concerned about their status before men than their acceptance by God when he says in [Matthew 23:6](#) "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men" [NAS95].

developing as He desires. The deification of the established order, however, is the self-congratulatory, smug invention of the lazy, secular, atheistic, lying human mindset that wants to make everything orderly and think that it has achieved total peace and security. It wants to think that it has reached the pinnacle of knowledge, wisdom, and moral behavior.

And then—then along comes this eccentric character, a Mr. Impudence, who fancies himself as being smarter and wiser than the established order. But this is not to say that he is self-deluded. It could very well be that he is the gadfly the established order needs to prod it out of its laziness and self-deification. Every human being is to live in fear and trembling before God, and this fear and trembling indicate that we are in the process of becoming—that we have not arrived and can never achieve total peace and security this side of God’s establishing His kingdom through Jesus the Messiah. And every individual, every group, and every nation should be aware of being in the process of becoming. In addition, fear and trembling signify that God exists—something every person and every established order ought not to forget for a moment.

It turns out that the Judaism of Jesus’ day had become, through the scribes and Pharisees, a complacent, self-deified established order. Notice this passage from the gospel of Luke—

Luke 18:9 And he also told this parable for the benefit of certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt,

18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **18:11** The Pharisee was standing and praying these things to himself,

God, I thank You that I am not like other people: thieves, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **18:12** I fast twice between Sabbaths. I tithe of everything I receive.

18:13 But the tax collector, standing afar off, was not even willing to lift his eyes towards heaven, but he was beating his breast and saying,

God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

18:14 I say to you, this man went down to his house justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus states that the Pharisee was praying “to himself.” He had so drunk the Kool-aid of the established order of Judaism that he believed that he was completely different from other sinners and that God was pleased with his external religious practices. But this meant that he had deified not only Judaism but also himself. He was using the words, “God, I thank you...” as if he were praying to the one, true God. However, he was praying to a false god—to himself! In contrast, the social outcast, the tax collector, genuinely prayed that God would be merciful to him. And Jesus says that God will forgive him and welcome him into the eternal Kingdom of God—because the tax collector is a single, individual human being who is unwilling to subordinate himself to the established order and, thereby, is a teacher of the profoundest truth, the truth of the inwardness of the heart.

The Established Order Destroys the Distinction Between the External and Inwardness

In the Judaism of Jesus’ day, the outer and the inner had lost all distinction with the result that the inner had disappeared in the thinking of the established order. External religious practices and the traditions of teachers other than the biblical authors had become so dominant in the minds of the Jewish leadership and their followers that they had lost all sight of their hearts where authentic spirituality must begin and continue to exist throughout a person’s entire life. This loss of distinction between the external and the inwardness of the heart is a sure sign that the established order has become its own God. Everything that could remind a person of the actual truth that rightfully fights against the established

order has been abolished as something that is now considered to be quite ridiculous and offensive. Now only the “truth” of the current established order is victorious, and the truth that opposed the previous established order has been transformed into a new and idolatrous established order.

To be in this new truth means that a person no longer has to suffer, while the Bible is very clear that the more a person is in the actual truth, the more hostility from the world he must endure. No, within the established order, a person becomes more honored, esteemed, and respected by being in its truth. And now everything is as it should be. Now the established order is God, so that if Jesus came to the world in our day, he would first become a university professor with a worldview marked by ideologies, philosophies, and morality that are different from God’s explanation of reality and His commandments in the Bible, and he would climb the ranks of honor and esteem of academia. Or he would become a politician, educated by the secular university professors and researchers, and there climb the ranks of power, honor, and esteem. Or he would become a pastor, educated by the orthodoxy of the church councils, their creeds, and the historical church traditions of beliefs and practices that are different from God’s instructions in the Bible in order to climb the ranks of honor and esteem within Christendom. He would even carefully take note of the cultural trends within his society and be sure to incorporate these into his teaching of the Bible, thus further distorting its message in order to remain relevant and to protect his church and him from offending others—and suffering persecution by them.

Obviously the scribes and Pharisees were also of this opinion. Suffering in this world for being authentically spiritual and truly godly was old-fashioned. Now there was congruity between the spirituality of Judaism and the world. Now the more pious a Jew became, the more honor and esteem he could expect from the world. Therefore, spirituality need take only a simple exam to determine its authenticity. Does a person fast twice a week? Does he tithe of all that he has, including mint, dill, and cummin?⁶ If so, then God is pleased. Or this is to say that the God of this person, i.e., himself, is pleased. And the same would be true of a professor, or a politician, or a pastor today. Do his colleagues consider him to be “orthodox” and correct in his beliefs, practices, values, and behaviors? Then his God, i.e., himself, is pleased also.

If any of these most esteemed leaders, a scribe, a Pharisee, a professor, a government official, or a pastor, wants to keep anything of what smacks of biblical truth and authentic spirituality hidden in the inwardness of his heart, then he can count on being rejected and ostracized by his fellow leaders and the world. The established order is always suspicious of anything hidden that cannot be quantified and measured. Only by destroying completely in mind and in practice any evidence of the true, inward mark can someone maintain a position of honor and esteem within his particular established order.

Yes, as already stated, with the same expertise with which a brand new rich person forgets that yesterday he was poor, so also an established order can forget its origin. And just as an individual human being can aspire to become something, so this is the same something to which any group, institution, or nation aspires. It wants to become an established order, to abolish God, and in fear of other men to bully the single individual into compliance. But God does not want this. And He uses the very opposite tactic. He uses the single individual as a gadfly to prod the established order out of self-complacency and thinking that it is God. Yet the question always is, will the established order listen to or, in the extreme, destroy the individual—as the Judaism of Jesus’ day eventually did to him (or thought they were doing!)?

The Established Order Plays It Safe By Remaining Children And Not Becoming Adults

When the distinction between the external and inwardness has been lost so that inwardness has dropped out completely, then the established order has become God and all appropriate fear and trembling is abolished. To live in such a “Christian” established order, especially to be honored and esteemed by it, is to continue to be tied to mother’s apron strings, to play it safe and settle for remaining a child and not

⁶ Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of being more concerned about tithing their garden herbs than they are about extending mercy and kindness to others when he says in [Matthew 23:23](#) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” [NAS95].

moving on to adulthood. It is to be a coward and exempt oneself from making the least kind of decision that causes me as a “single individual” to suffer. In fact, far from suffering, I live in the fantasy world of enjoying the highest probability of sure advancement straight into eternal life—where eternal life must judge the person exactly as the established order does, because it is God.

“Why,” says the ‘Christian’ established order to the single individual, “do you torture and torment yourself with the unrealistic standard of acknowledging the depth of your sin and the absolute necessity of God’s undeserved grace? Turn to the established order and its traditional beliefs. Join the established order with its time-proven truth that is accepted by everyone. Here you will find the correct standard for evaluating all ideas and information. If you are a student, be assured that your professors know the truth, and trust them for everything they say and encourage you to believe and do. If you are a citizen, be assured that your political leaders know the truth, and trust them for everything they say and direct you to do. If you are a church member, be assured that your pastor knows the truth, and trust him for everything he teaches and directs you to do. Don’t strain yourself by seeking to find out the truth for yourself. The established order will do all the necessary studying and research for you. It is the rational repository of all truth, and you are fortunate for being even a small part of it. Do your small part, and leave the rest to the experts—the professors, the government officials, and the pastors.”

“But what about my gaining eternal life?” you ask. “Yes, of course you will acquire it! And if, when the time comes for you to move on into eternity, you think there might be something wrong with the established order, if you cannot be satisfied with being like all the others, packaged and wrapped with a ribbon tied neatly around it to be delivered to God in one of the big boxes that the established order ships to eternal life under its own seal and with the address ‘Eternal Happiness,’ perfectly certain of being just as well received and just as blessed as ‘all the others’... In short, if you cannot let yourself be satisfied with the reassuring guarantee and security that the established order vouches for your eternal life and happiness, then keep it to yourself. The established order has nothing against your remaining silent about it. And you will still be just as well off as the others.”

The Established Order Separates Everything From God

The deification of the established order is the secularization of everything. It is the intentional detachment of everything from God. With regard to some matters, the established order may be right. It may actually speak the truth, such as when it says, “The earth is round,” or, “Murder is a crime,” or, “The Bible is our source of truth.” And a person can join the established order and fulfill his part within it in a satisfactory way by repeating these truths and remaining a team player who does not rock the boat. But ultimately all established orders secularize a person’s relationship with God, even if they claim to encourage people in their relationship with God. The established order wants to keep people’s relationship with God in line with its ungodliness, and it does so by measuring this relationship with the yardstick of its beliefs and external practices that are detached from God and the Bible. In this way, people’s relationship with God is no different from simply playing their part within the established order. Indeed, it becomes their role, because the established order is their God.

This is instead of making the relationship with the one, true God the highest priority, the absolute, for every individual human being. But when the individual’s God-relationship is supreme, it is exactly what keeps the established order on edge, because God, having made the person’s relationship with Him so important, knows that He has recruited a spy, an informer, a truth-witness, who with single-minded devotion and obedience in the midst of persecution, suffering, and even death keeps the established order on edge.

When an individual appeals to his relationship with God in opposition to the established order that has made itself God, it does seem as if he is making himself more than human. But he is not doing that at all, for he admits that every human being should have the same relationship with God. For example, when a person says that he is in love, does he deny that anyone else is in love or can be in love? Absolutely not! So even less does an individual who claims to have a relationship with God deny that any other human being has one or should have one. However, the established order will not tolerate being a loose collection of tens, hundreds, thousands, or millions of individuals, each of whom has his own relationship

with God that is the primary relationship for each individual. The established order wants, indeed demands, to be totalitarian. It recognizes nothing above itself, not even God, but clasps every individual—their minds, their bodies, and their souls—as being under it and judges every person who subordinates himself to the established order. In contrast, the single individual who teaches the most humble doctrine, the doctrine of what it really means to be a human being, the doctrine of the inwardness of the heart, the established order will bully by charging him with blasphemy.

Thus also were the Pharisees offended at Jesus, because he made authentic spirituality into absolute inwardness not directly measurable by external practices. Instead, of all things, he made authentic spirituality measurable by suffering.⁷ And by making genuine devotion to God inwardness, Jesus prodded the external minded Jews to abandon their love for human honor and esteem and for power and influence over their followers. However, being convinced that they were right and assured that eventually Jesus would lose the war they were fighting against him, the scribes and Pharisees posed the question to him of why his disciples are not adhering to the traditional orthodoxy of those they considered to be the best Bible teachers, “Why do your disciples violate the tradition of the elders, because they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?”

It is always this way when the established order has gone so far as to make itself God. Finally councils, creeds, traditional religious practices, doctrinal statements, academic and political protocol, even propaganda become articles of faith. These are all that matter and are important to the established order in the light of their absolute need for each other’s esteem and respect. And truth has dropped out of sight. In addition, the individuals in the established order, whether leaders or followers, do not think that they have to make their relationship with God their absolute and highest possession, even if they talk incessantly about their relationship with God. This is because they have been duped into thinking that their relationship with the established order IS their relationship with God. As a result, their relationship with God has been abolished. Instead, their creeds, traditions, etc. are their God. But this kind of fear of God is nothing but contempt for God. Indeed, they do not fear God. They fear people! This is why Jesus answers the Pharisees, “Why do you violate God’s commandment for the sake of your tradition?” And he goes on to say, “Thus you have annihilated the message of God for the sake of your tradition.” Which is to say that the scribes and Pharisees have become so holy, and so holy do people always become when they make the established order their God, that their worship makes a fool of the one, true God. Under the guise and pretense of worshiping and adoring God, they worship and adore their own invention and themselves, either in self-complacent joy, because they are the inventors of their God, or in fear of people, because they care more about being honored and esteemed by them.

But, to repeat, the person who fails to appreciate and worship such an established order comes to be regarded as one who makes himself more than human. And people are offended by him, even though he really is only making God God and himself a human being—indeed, an authentic human being of the inwardness of the heart.

⁷ A great example of this connection between proclaiming inwardness and suffering for it when the single individual collides with the established order who is offended by him is Stephen in Acts 7. He says to the Jewish Sanhedrin, [Acts 7:51](#) “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. [52](#) Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; [53](#) you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it” [NAS95]. The result was that the Jewish leaders stoned Stephen to death.