

Why History's Injustices Follow Us When We Are Not Conscious Of God

1 Peter 2:19

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

2 Peter 2:19

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”

In God's world Jesus's death and resurrection is a game changer of unparalleled proportions for those who become conscious of God, repent their sins, and have God's grace bestowed on them. As believers, our faith resides in the belief that God ransomed His son's life so that we might be forgiven for turning our backs on God. God's love regenerates and transforms sinful hearts through the intercession of the ever powerful and transforming Holy Spirit.

I'm writing today to discuss a most crucial qualitative difference between believers and nonbelievers. I'm pinpointing a universal and crucial characteristic of the dynamic flow between conscious and unconscious life that holds eternal ramification for the fate of our souls. I'm borrowing Freud's vernacular, to introduce the compulsion to repeat history.

For the past 40 years, an interval of time that spans my time in secular psychotherapeutic treatment, my career as a secular psychotherapist, including my recent life as a believer, I've been attuned to my propensity to take unconscious sojourns back in time to change history. We all do so to transcend insults and injuries to our identities. Mine were inflicted by primary attachment figures early in my life.

You might say that my furious objections to accepting as irrevocable the suffering attendant to these unforgivable injustices fueled a compulsion to undo the alleged damage to my capacities to love self and others, to my self-esteem, and the enjoyment of being. I feared the damage would interfere with my mastery of developmental milestones, and the establishment of secure attachments to others, which I presumed I would need to support me to make meaningful contributions to society. To settle for anything less was deemed to be an admission that the misery inflicted on me was deserved, that I was inherently bad or defective.

Such was an intolerable fate and unpalatable bitter pill for this nonbeliever to swallow. I could not fathom going through life so disabled. In truth, Hell as my coup de grace was not on my radar. Nonetheless, what I could not master and undo in terms of obtaining a mulligan on my traumatic beginnings, imposed on me a detestable choice, work in earnest to mitigate my own suffering, or perpetuate my misery. This was the adaptive legacy of me recognizing and bumping my head against the hard and fast limitations of myself and others. Meaning, I did not get what I wanted, but in the controlled environments of my therapists' offices, I most definitely did get what I needed to cultivate what Carol Dweck termed "a growth mindset." Banging my head against the impossibilities that my imagination's wishful and magical thinking could restore me to a premorbid state of health, reawakened me to the need to work within the reality of cause and effect, over and over again. The futility of trying to change history is paradoxically an adequate means of explaining an old axiom that describes the process of reinvention, one step backward and two steps forward.

My efforts to change history suggest that I was much like a dog with a juicy bone clamped between my jaws. I would not let go. When I believed that the hills I chose to climb were insurmountable or unfairly much harder for me than my peers, envy, self-pity, depression, and anxiety propelled me back in time. You might say I was as addicted to rewriting history as much as an inveterate and refractory heroin addict is addicted to "numbing out." Reinterpreting history, which was as good as it was going to get to free me up to move forward with my life, just didn't cut it. What I could not master enslaved me (2 Peter 2:19), to my own false sense of aggrandizement. I often did not bear up well when convinced that my suffering was unjust and intolerable, and it was not until age 66 that I realized that this had everything to do with not being conscious of God (1 Peter 2:19). I wished to play God and feared I'd fall short finding myself helpless without God but to make my sinful nature a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such was the nature of this tireless compulsion.

You don't have to value the examination of one's mind to know that repeating history was one of the centerpieces of Freud's theories of normal and abnormal development. We all engage in it, because when unconscious and sleepwalking with our eyes wide open, no one is conscious of God. However, you will not hear any secular therapists who have not been made righteous in the sight of God characterize this phenomena as indicative of our sinful natures. In layman's terms they would say, "what we don't remember we repeat." Einstein with tongue in

check called this compulsion “insanity,” doing the same thing and expecting a different result.

If we all to one degree or another repeat history, then what causes those who have not experienced significant trauma in their lives to live in the past, only to harbor regrets that their lives in some measure have passed them by? My theory is that we are all born with amnesia as God’s creations, fated to suffer God’s righteous wrath for the sins of our fallen forbears. Meanwhile, we begin life with a warped sense of what we can and cannot control, molded by necessity being the mother of invention. Helplessly dependent infants cannot survive the sinful fallibility of their parents if they do not begin their lives in narcissistic cocoons armed with the delusion of being the center, and the master, of their universes. You might say that this universal case of mistaken identities becomes a tragic flaw for those who do not awaken to the truth that we are made by God in His image to need Him and serve Him.

This tragic flaw, which fuels the repetition compulsion, is a combination of vestiges of our infant mindsets that potentially fuel meaningless suffering and despair. I’m defining meaningless suffering and despair as living in a way that decimates our trust and faith in love’s redemptive power. I looked at death and dying through the eyes of a nonbeliever as a formula for me to lose all the disposable vestiges of my valued identity, largely aspects of prideful attachments to such ephemeral characteristics as athletic vitality, immunity to illness, and artistic meaning-making capacities. About the time I heard God knocking during the initial phase of the pandemic, I shivered with panic at the thought of aging badly and becoming a helpless burden on others for months or maybe years. Then I thought about the possibility of receiving a first-class ticket to Hell, and the next thing I knew I was not taking my investigative research into Christianity lightly.

I’m of the opinion that the psychological artifacts of infancy include the fiction that unconditional love is our birthright and indispensable to our valued identity. What follows from this for me is that, for many of us who may have been overly indulged with unconditional love or conversely found our narcissistic cocoons prematurely impinged upon, our legacies are similar. We regard the relinquishment of our egocentric grandiosity, a necessary loss during the socialization process with suspicion, protest, and self-righteous indignation. I’m reminded of the time my mother snatched the pacifier from my mouth and together we marched to the incinerator where she threw it down the shoot. I regarded societal expectations that

I achieve developmental milestones on schedule as if I was being asked to clear 10-foot hurdles with razor sharp edges to them.

This is very much the anatomy of abnormal developmental trends that fuel inveterate and refractory beliefs that we can recast our morality plays, compel others to recapitulate these dramas, and internalize corrective experiences that will reverse the damages. My parents unwittingly bestowed on me a double whammy, an indecipherable pattern of making me too important to the regulation of their own self-esteem and happiness, while making me very unimportant in my own right.

What I have been discussing up to this juncture is a powerful co-mingling of ideas about truth, justice, forgiveness, love, and power influenced and distorted by unconscious and somewhat static lenses. Let me offer you some examples of what repeating history translates to for believers and nonbelievers alike when we are not conscious of God and our dependence on Him.

An example of the repetition compulsion is finding yourself as a first-time parent getting lost in a time warp with your child, where you reprise the roles of your former child-like self while ceding parental authority to your child and vice versa, only to be aghast at repeating what you witnessed growing up in your natal family and swore never to repeat. If this example does not resonate with you, then perhaps you can identify with feeling compelled by the unconscious forces of attraction to recapitulate roles with new love interests that mimic patterns that led to the demise of former romantic entanglements. Some of you probably swore that you did everything in your power this time around to choose someone who on the surface appeared to be markedly different in appearance and tone from your past lover, only to find yourself locked in the same complementary dances destined for a similar tear-laden outcome.

What I discovered in my 66th year, which most believers intuit if not ponder, is that in God's universe no one earns salvation. I spent most of my life trying to do and undo my essential nature. Meanwhile, judging by my obsession with past matters that made me unhappy, all my positive growth and prosocial behavioral change didn't amount to a hill of beans, for I resisted what was inevitable, being damned for not being gifted God's grace and the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit. What my faith in God has changed for me is unimaginable, despite still being a sinner who is not above trying to play God with recorded history. What is mind boggling to me is that God sacrificed His son out of love for me. No matter my

regrets over having pissed away so many opportunities to delight in loving God, myself and my neighbors, I will be rewarded for my new-found faith in God with an eternal home in Heaven. To recognize that I am included in God's plans has eliminated my dread and despair of suffering in the final phases of my life. Whereas as a nonbeliever I looked to dying with plans to euthanize myself, now I approach dying with loving gratitude for God and an abiding wish to die well, with faithful dignity.