



## But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. – Matthew 15:9

[invaindotheyworshipme.com](http://invaindotheyworshipme.com)

Years ago, when I was in high school, I stumbled on what turned out to be a key realization. But before I explain it, I need to provide a little background. When I was a year old my dad finished his four years in the Air Force and used his GI benefits to go to college at Emmanuel Missionary College in Berrien Springs, MI (now Andrews University). There he studied to become a preacher in the church he was raised in.

So I was raised in that church as well. When I started school I attended schools run by that church. Supposedly, I knew all there was to know about religion and godliness. I could amaze the members of my dad's churches with my knowledge of Bible and doctrinal topics. If you're imagining a rather arrogant preacher's brat you're probably right.

My parents were both quite conservative, and the high schools run by the church didn't really satisfy them. They saw them as too permissive. I can't testify to what they permitted, but I can tell you some dark things about what happened at them. There was talk of sending me to some non-accredited schools run outside the church system.

Then we stopped in Utah on our way back from a vacation in California. Mom knew some doctors who lived there and got directions to their church. We got an invite in the process and ate lunch at one of the doctor's houses after church. These doctors liked my dad's conservative bent and arranged for their conference president to call my dad to pastor their church. We moved in November of that same year.

The next fall the doctor's had helped to finance one of these non-accredited high schools near Moab, Utah, just a couple of miles from the Colorado River. So that's where I attended for my junior and senior years. Today I could launch into

a long telling of their theological and philosophical failings. But that's not my point. That first year there I discovered something that still rings true nearly fifty years later. True religion was primarily a denial of self.

So even in places where truth has trouble finding entrance between all the fevered fabrications humans are so good at dreaming up, real truth still can be heard. And now I get to the point I want to make in this essay: our understanding of truth grows and develops as we grow and develop and we understand old truths in new ways that we wouldn't have understood when we first learned the old truths.

So today I find selfishness in things I wouldn't have given second thought to in my high school years. I now realize that the thought patterns that led me to choose to take up religion again, having abandoned it in my sophomore and junior years, were fundamentally selfish.

Which reminds me of some statements from a writer who was ground into us back in those days. "Self is the enemy we most need to fear." We don't need to fear Satan, he's a defeated enemy. We don't need to fear God, his character of love means we can trust him explicitly. But self? It finds ways to gain the supremacy even when we think we're crucifying it.

Another such statement I can't quote verbatim, but it suggests that we will need to abandon the selfishness that led us to Jesus to begin with. So over the years I have learned that my own selfishness was astoundingly blatant years ago. It probably still is. But I look back on things I did when I was younger and I cringe. Should I live long enough I will probably cringe when I recall things I'm doing now.

Sin is selfishness. When we have overcome self we will have overcome sin. The rules won't matter any more because the love that is the opposite of self-focus will guide us to true righteousness. Maybe that's why so many people finish the work of character development at death. When a person submits to death they are making a final, irrevocable self-sacrifice.

But I have long believed that God intends to raise up a group of people who will reach that point without having to die. One might even say that those will be the one hundred forty-four thousand. But none of them will ever claim to have won the battle against self. They will be so keenly aware of the purity (absolute unselfishness) of their Redeemer that their own lives will seem tawdry in comparison.

And the same can be said of our understanding of truth. Yes, we can have a view of truth now and we can even abandon many of the lies we were raised to believe. But to fully understand all truth is not humanly possible. We'll learn for all eternity. That should make us humble, and tolerant of others whose understanding of certain truths isn't the same as ours. Who's to say if they aren't closer to God than we?

Copyright 2018 by Hannah