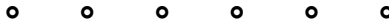


Vulnerable – in reality or in belief only? **Jamae Wolfram Richardson (van Eck)**

What appeared as shattered self-esteem began to mend. There was deep spiritual regeneration. And within little more than a year's time he stopped the use of drugs, continued his education, and was once again physically well.



Many today recognize the subjectivity of human life – that our thinking largely determines our experience. Such a perspective may indicate, far more than we realize, that our fears are self-generated, our ills are self-constituted, our limitations are self-enforced.

One may appear to be his own worst enemy – and this is obvious in such things as drug abuse, self-destructive patterns of behavior, or even suicidal tendencies. More subtly, it appears as bad traits that seem stubborn (uncontrolled temper, chronic lateness, arrogance, disorder, procrastination) or as negative emotions (fear, grief, resentment, envy, hate). Indeed, certain diseases are believed to involve some sort of reversal or destruction of what is termed the body's immune system, so it appears that either the body is attacking itself or is particularly vulnerable to disease.

But can one really destroy himself? Can he truly be a disturbed personality, a victim of abusive circumstances or perhaps of inherited traits, chronic fears, ingrained emotions? Is one's nature inherently weak or frail, bound to suffer, prone to disease, trapped in self-afflictive attitudes or self-destructive tendencies?

Not is reality. As Mrs. Eddy explains in *Miscellaneous Writings*: “We have no enemies . . . Even in belief you have but one (that, not in reality), and this one enemy is yourself – your erroneous belief that you have enemies; that evil is real; that aught but good exists in Science.” (*Mis.*, p. 10) What Christian Science makes plain is that man is God's image – wholly good and

forever untouched by mortality or the belief that life, substance, and intelligence are in or of matter.

One of the best depictions of this belief is in the second, allegorical account of creation in Genesis: a man formed of dust, incomplete, prone to temptation and sin, cursed for disobedience and thrust out from eternal life – all the while carrying within himself the seeds of his own wretchedness.

But that never was an accurate portrayal of man's genuine, spiritual nature. It never was anything but a misconception of man, a mistaken belief about him. Christ Jesus' mission was the exact opposite of this: to bear witness to God, divine Truth; to illustrate in his own life blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:13) Jesus made plain that there is no Father, no source, but God, and that His will for His children is good; that God, the divine Spirit, Love, creates only what is loving and lovely and maintains what He creates. There is no fall from perfection for man, then, other than in belief.

Jesus' parable of the tares and wheat (see Matt. 13:24-30) illustrates the separateness of man's real selfhood from whatever elements of mortality would seem to grow up as part of him. In Jesus' parable the tares never get into the wheat; they don't keep it from ripening, from coming to fruition, or from being gathered in. God's purpose is fulfilled in the wheat – in every right or spiritual idea – and nothing can set that purpose and fulfillment aside.

Referring to the parable, Mrs. Eddy writes in *Science and Health*: "The temporal and unreal never touch the eternal and real. The mutable and imperfect never touch the immutable and perfect. The inharmonious and self-destructive never touch the harmonious and self-existent. These opposite qualities are the tares and wheat, which never really mingle, though (to mortal sight) they grow side by side until the harvest; the Science separates the wheat from the tares, through the realization of God as ever present and of man as reflecting the divine likeness." (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 300)

An understanding of the immutability of true being, and insistence upon it even in the face of illness and demoralizing sin, can bring about restoration of what has seemed permanently hurt or irretrievably lost. For example: without his parents' knowledge, an intellectually able and sensitive young man suffered repeated sexual abuse as a child. This led to a series of unhappy experiences and to several disastrous encounters with older men. Beset with guilt and self-condemnation and turning his anger upon himself, the boy became deeply involved with drugs. After a number of years, the severe decline of his health, combined with fear of AIDS, made life nearly unbearable. In desperation he sought help from a Christian Science practitioner.

He was assured that his true selfhood remained untouched by evil of any sort – that his native spiritual innocence could never be truly lost or his life as God's child destroyed. He was helped to see that he could never be separated from divine Love and that this was his guarantee of immunity from harm.

What appeared as shattered self-esteem began to mend. There was deep spiritual regeneration. And within little more than a year's time he stopped the use of drugs, continued his education, and was once again physically well. In fact, he passed several rigorous medical examinations in relation to government requirements for licensing in his field. Today he is gainfully employed and married.

Such a healing bears out this promise in Job: "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom . . . He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness." (Job 33:23, 24, 26)

Why can't one actually be a victim – either of others' actions or of his own reaction? Because in spiritual fact there is no cause but God and no effect but good. God is not the author of whatever is cruel or wrong or abusive, of either physical or moral deformity. Therefore no one, in reality, can be subject to any such thing. Instead, man is subject only to divine

authority. He is therefore no more a damaged, defective, abnormal personality than he is a diseased, disordered physical body. Man, made in the image of Spirit, God, must be spiritual, and his harmony and perfection inviolable.

Whatever the eternal, spiritual fact is, the human sense of things has to conform to it. Basically, what has to be changed is not so much a set of circumstances or simply a physical condition but rather one's view – often of oneself. One has to learn to know himself as God knows him – to accept and cherish his never-abused, never-abandoned, never-altered spiritual selfhood. It's not a humanly willed process of restructuring human consciousness that's needed but mental awakening, yielding of human misperceptions to divine reality, spiritual rebirth. The textbook of Christian Science, *Science and Health*, explains it this way: "The eternal Truth destroys what mortals seem to have learned from error, and man's real existence as a child of God comes to light." (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, pp. 288-289)

This coming to light is inevitable. And while we're patient and persistent in our efforts to discern what's true and to live, as best we can, in accord with it, we really don't have to wait for it. Eternal Truth is true now; it always has been and always will be. Truth is without the medium of time or process, and it is imperative.

Though nothing that appears to go on humanly can change the spiritually real, our understanding of what is spiritually real does change – it does transform – the human sense of things. This is divinity's embrace of humanity. It is the operation of God's law on earth as in heaven. What has to be done away with or overcome is the belief that man is mortal – that his innocence is precarious, his health uncertain, his happiness fragile, his opportunity limited.

The divine Mind alone knows, and man reflects Mind's knowing. *Only in belief* is there a limited human thought to hold a distorted or incorrect view of anything and to suffer from what it mistakenly perceives. That's why

spiritual awakening leaves no latent or unhealed impression of error, either in thought or body.

There aren't two powers; there's not a cosmic or an internal dualism. Any seeming enemy (even one's self) is only the claim that a mind of power apart from God exists or can operate. But God, good, is infinite, All. What we call evil can't really overpower our spiritual and moral integrity. It hasn't the power or authority it claims. It isn't man's true thought. Therefore, we courageously and intelligently deny it any agent or system or operation. To truly understand this profound moral and spiritual fact is to obliterate, to blot out, both the claim of evil and its seeming consequences.

Christian Science makes plain that the so-called mortal mind sees and feels only what it believes. It is the Christ that shows us what's real and helps us distinguish between the seeming and the actual – helps us judge righteous judgment and defend ourselves mentally from the error of believing, fearing, and reacting to what is, in truth, only a lie.

The promised Comforter, or Science of Christ, is here to show humanity how to break that deception, to show each one his uprightness – his inviolate status as the child of God. The result appears as binding up of the heart-broken, opening of prisons of disease and disability, restoring of wasted years and disappointed hopes. It appears as redemption from sin – a fulfilling of the promise that man can never be alienated from God, as seen by the prophet Hosea and repeated by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: “And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.” (Rom. 9:26; see Hos. 2:23)

Jamae van Eck