

# Do Good Intentions Justify Falsehood?

6/01/2020

## Introduction

After I released my book, *Degrees of Love and Forgiveness* (DLAF), two pertinent questions were raised by various parties involved: (1) Since I used intent to justify my actions, could Sue not use intent to justify her actions? (2) Since I did not accuse Sue of lying when she accused my wife and I of being cold and unloving, why should Sue be expected to confess her accusation as sin?

## Intent

Perspectives by those involved regarding intent ran from *intent justifies an action* to *intent does not matter*. Both attitudes are extremist and thus subject to error. The truth is somewhere in-between. In a DLF section entitled, *Nouthetic Mocking*, I explained that if mocking is defined exclusively with the negative connotation of *simply seeking to do harm*, then I was acquitted of the accusation of mocking since I was *seeking to be helpful*: “The difference between non-nouthetic mocking and nouthetic mocking comes down to ultimate intent. Ultimately, are you seeking to harm or to help by using mocking?”<sup>1</sup>

How might such statements be used in Sue’s defense? One might argue that being disrespectful and hurtful in her letter were not her intent. Since she was not willfully seeking to be harmful, she is not culpable for being disrespectful and hurtful. Ultimately, she was trying to help rather than hurt with her disrespectful and hurtful comments. Thus, the argument might be made that *intent-justifies-the-means* (IJTM). Taken to an extreme, this argumentation could insist that *if your intentions are good, it does not matter what you do or say*. Some might pose that our motives and intentions are the only things that matter because these are what God will judge:

- All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but **the Lord weighs the motives** (Prov 16:2).
- Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things *hidden* in the darkness and **disclose the motives of men’s hearts**; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God. (1Cor 4:5)
- For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to **judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart**. (Heb 4:12)

Indeed, such passages refute the counter-extremist claim that *intent does not matter*. Nevertheless, the extremist claim that *intent is all that matters* is just as false. Motives are a factor, but they are not the only factor. Numerous times, the Bible warns that God will also judge our works (e.g., Mt 16:27; 2Cor 5:10; 1Pet 1:17). God will judge what we do, not just why we did it. Limitations applied to *end-justifies-the-means* (EJTM) in my *Monogamous Sex in Heaven* (MSIH) apply equally well to arguments that *intent-justifies-the-means* (IJTM). I will not repeat that EJTM discussion here but will extract the following quote since it is most applicable:

Graded absolutism is similar to the principle of double effect, which states that when two results—a good result and an evil result—emerge from one act, the individual is held responsible only for the intended good result and not the evil result that necessarily resulted from the good intention. For example, a doctor who amputates to save a life is not morally culpable for maiming but is to be morally praised for saving a life. (p. 110.)

Does a good end justify an evil means as long as one has good intentions? The answer would seem to be yes, from this simple explanation and example. This would seem tantamount to utilitarianism’s claim, however, that a well-intended good result justifies an evil result; in short the *end justifies the means* (EJTM).

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<sup>1</sup> Marty Cauley, *Degrees of Love and Forgiveness: An Integration Between Nikology, Polemology, and Mithology* (Sylva, NC: Mithological Press, 2019), 101.

The fallacy of this EJTM conclusion was demonstrated in MSIH. The model shown to be superior therein was a *qualified-end-justifies-the-means* (QEJTM). The intent sometimes, not always, justifies the means. As also noted in MSIH: “There are moral boundaries as to what we can and cannot do, but we have a range of freedom within those boundaries—and some things are amoral. We do not have a rule, duty, or hierarchy that dictates our every move. In certain cases, we may have a range of freedom.” In other words, gray exists, but not everything is gray. Black and white also exist.

The black-and-white limitation of moral boundaries also applies to intent. Therefore, DLAF allows that Dianne and I, among others, may take different courses of action in dealing with the situation as long as we operate within biblical boundaries. However, if moral boundaries are crossed, then sin is committed. Consequently, in DLAF I went into considerable detail to explain why my actions were within the moral boundaries of nouthetic counseling as my preferred method of dealing with the matter biblically, and thus why I would continue to take that course of action. I did not merely appeal to my good intentions. My intent does not justify my actions if my actions are not within acceptable biblical parameters. Neither does Sue’s intent justify her actions if her actions are not within acceptable biblical parameters. Accordingly, DLAF explained at length why Sue has not operated within biblical boundaries. For instance, as described in DLAF, no matter what her intentions are, I will not appease Sue’s use of emotional blackmail or treating Dianne and me like a doormat. Good intentions do not justify emotional blackmail or temper tantrums.

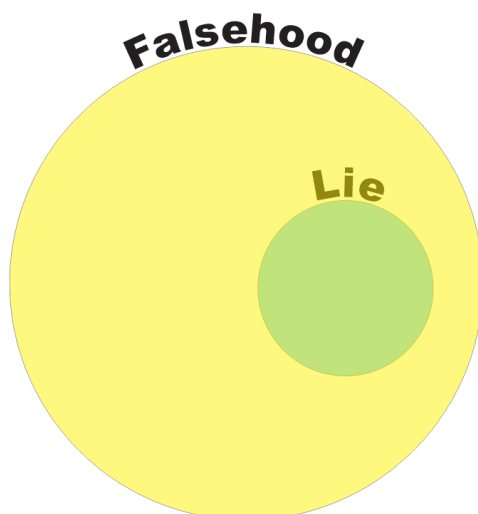
#### *Unintentional versus Intentional Falsehood*

Although I was very clear in DLAF that I believe Sue was stating her true convictions when she said that Dianne and I are cold and unloving, some erroneously assumed that I was accusing Sue of lying. When I inquired as to why they thought I was accusing Sue of lying, it was because they failed to distinguish a lie from a falsehood. Apparently, further clarification is needed for some readers who are not well versed in my writings or who have not thought through the difference between telling a lie and speaking falsely. It comes down to intent.

- The noun *lying* refers to the *intentional* act of deviating from the truth.
- The verb *lie* refers to the *intentionally* telling of an untruth, to pretend with the *intent* to speak falsely.
- A *falsehood*, in contrast, is simply a statement that is not true.

All lies are falsehoods, but not all falsehoods are lies. One can unintentionally speak a falsehood; doing so is not a lie because one is not intentionally speaking a falsehood in that case. Mathematically speaking, in terms of Venn Diagrams, lies are a subset of falsehoods.

*Illustration 1. Lie  $\subset$  Falsehood*



*Intent* is the critical factor distinguishing a mere falsehood from a deliberate falsehood, that is, from a lie. Mistakenly computing the answer for a math problem does not make you a liar. The same rationale applies to *falling short*. Falling short of telling the truth is not necessarily a lie. If one does not intentionally fall short in telling the truth, then one has not lied. I have explained this difference with various illustrations in my writings:

To err is human, but it is also a trait shared by angels. God is not able to fully trust His image bearers, either divine or human: “Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? He puts no trust even in His servants; and He charges error against His angels” (Job 4:17-18; TM).” Even heavenly angels err, so the heavenly realm is not error free: “Behold, He puts no trust in His holy angels [lit. holy ones], and the heavens are not pure in His sight” (Job 15:15; TM)...making mistakes is not necessarily equitable with sin. One can be sincere, but be sincerely wrong, yet being sincerely wrong is not necessarily sin. Even in Heaven one still can make mistakes and miss the mark. Trying to define sin simplistically in terms of classical Greek as missing a mark is imprudent. We will not all be able to hit a hole-in-one on every shot while playing golf in Heaven. Missing the mark will not mean that we have sinned. Sinless students in Heaven trying to solve complex math problems will make mistakes. This does not mean that they will have sinned. All sin is falling short, but not all falling short is sin. By the NT time *sin* no longer simply meant “‘missing the mark’ or ‘failing when trying’”; rather, sin was considered to be “deliberate disobedience....the word always had an ethical sense of not conforming to a standard.” Therefore, these statements in Job about errant holy angels need not necessarily mean that they are fallen angels. (MSIH)

This rationale also applies to Jesus:

A reasonable conjecture is that the Lord knowingly put Himself, via His incarnation, into a position where He could experience what it is like to be fully human in learning from His mistakes. In other words, before His incarnation the Lord knew what mistakes He would make, for instance, in His spelling and mathematics during the early years of His childhood; nevertheless, He chose to allow Himself to become incarnate and to make such mistakes so that He might have the human experience of learning from His mistakes. After all, He grew in wisdom (Lk 2:52), and making a mistake is not necessarily sin. Every sin is a mistake, but not every mistake is a sin. (MMP2)

In DLAF, I made a similar statement:

To err is human; to err willfully is sin. Even sinless angels can err without sinning. Thus, more comprehensively, we might say that to err unintentionally is simply to be fallible, to be a created being. To be culpable of transgression, we must transgress, not merely feel guilty. Being fallible is not equatable with being guilty.

I also provided a personal example in DLAF:

As we walk in the light, we simply confess the sins of which we become aware. If we are unaware of them, they are automatically covered by the blood if we are walking in the light. We do not need to be introverted or hypersensitive in seeking for sin in our lives. Simply, if we become aware of sin, we just need to confess it so that our fellowship with God remains unbroken. Mature believers can go for days without needing to confess anything. Similarly, in our marriage, Dianne and I very rarely need to tell one another that we are sorry for something or ask for forgiveness. As I write this note, we are getting ready to celebrate our 36<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary next week. Earlier in our marriage, we had to ask each other for forgiveness with some regularity. Nowadays, not nearly so much. In fact, hardly ever do we need to offer a formal apology (i.e., confession), saying, “I’m sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me.” This is not to say that we do not do or say anything that might get on each other nerves if we let them; rather, the infractions are so small, relatively speaking, that we can normally just cover them in love and move on and remain in fellowship, practicing “forbearance to one another in love” (Eph 4:2). Most of the time we just ignore these quirks because they are not worth mentioning in the context of our loving fellowship.

Sometimes we can even tease each other about our shortcomings. Does this mean that we tease about sin? No. But not every shortcoming is a sin. All sin is a shortcoming, but not all shortcoming is a sin. As has been stated already, to err is human; to err willfully is sin. Being fallible is not a sin. To further illustrate, I am very forgetful. My memory is very fallible. Sometimes, Dianne will tease me

about it. I generally don't even say that I'm sorry on those occasions. Sometimes, she gets mildly frustrated about it, depending on how big a deal the item was that I forgot. On those occasions, sometimes I will say, "I'm sorry." And she forbears with my absentmindedness. But even then, I don't offer the full-blown, formal apology, saying, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me." Why? Because I did not intentionally forget. It was not willful, so I don't ask, "Will you forgive me?"

Intent matters. Consequently, as explained in DLAF, I spoke in Sue's defense when we meet with our Sunday School teacher:

At the conclusion of the follow-up meeting, the teacher asked if Sue would acknowledge wrongdoing in the disrespect that she had shown to me and Dianne in her letter. She would not because she said she could not recall the details of the letter. He asked if she would acknowledge wrongdoing in calling me uncaring. She would not. At this point, I interjected, on Sue's behalf that, given her perspective, it would not be possible for her to do so. She could not confess to something as a sin that she did not believe to be sin.

*Necessity of Confession*

In my opinion, the teacher was too optimistic to think that Sue could confess her accusation as sin at that time. I did not believe that Sue had lied in calling Dianne and me cold and unloving. I believe she had spoken falsely but not deceptively. To be sure, I agreed with the teacher that Sue had been disrespectful in the letter. Sue had shown a history of treating Dianne disrespectfully. For example, as noted in DLAF, Sue had told Dianne: "You are a vicious **snake** that bites me and smiles while doing it" (Sue's emphasis, 8/29/2018). So, while the teacher had a valid point in pointing out how disrespectful Sue's letter was, I did not believe that his expectation to be reasonable at that juncture. She could not be expected to confess her statement as sin since she thought she had spoken the truth. Granted, the argument could be made that it was sin in the sense of being disrespectful, but my preference was that it be acknowledged as sin in the sense of being untruthful, not merely disrespectful. Therefore, I did not wish to press the matter at that time because it would take time for me to demonstrate why that was the case. Hence, one reason I wrote the DLAF was to meet that need, as expressed therein:

Sue would have to repent and confess her sins documented in this book. However, I do not believe this is possible unless Sue reads the book because she would first have to be convinced that her actions were sinful and that mere apologies are insufficient in such cases.... Given the complexity of the situation, my belief was that true resolution would require a full explanation, which is why I wrote this book.

The bottom line is that since Sue equates affection with caring, if I am not being affectionate in what I am saying, then, in her opinion, I am being unloving and uncaring. Therefore, she said that she would not read this book, regardless of what I say, because she says that I do not care. In other words, I am not showing the affection she believes is necessary to constitute love and caring. If loving and caring are linked ball-and-chain to affection, then she has a valid point. However, the thesis of my book is that love and caring are not equatable with affection. Therefore, her criticizing me as being unloving and uncaring is false, and her rejecting this book as failing to be a form of love and caring is groundless.

Having thoroughly demonstrated in DLAF that Sue's logic was faulty in equating love with affection, I repeatedly explained in DLAF why confession would be necessary. Basically, with the advent of the book, her accusation had now been shown to be false; therefore, her accusation had transgressed moral boundaries, necessitating confession. Even though her accusation was not intentionally false, and thus not a lie, it was factually false, and thus needed to be acknowledged as such—a false accusation. Moreover, a false accusation against someone's character is sin. In Sue's case, it was an unintentional sin. Thus, it could not be confessed as sin until it was exposed as being a false accusation. Accordingly, DLAF delved into explaining why it was a false accusation and thus a sin. It needed to be exposed as such so that it could be confessed as such. To date, Sue has made no such confession. Yet, as explained in DLAF, level-2 forgiveness requires such confession. Granting corresponding forgiveness apart from confession would be unbiblical, failing to comply with biblical standards. Consequently, I

am not at liberty to ignore the biblical standard and grant Sue level-2 forgiveness for her offense.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, for Sue not to confess her sin now, after this demonstration, would move her refusal from the category of an unintentional sin to an intentional sin. John puts it this way:

<sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;<sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jn 1:6-9)

As explained in DLAF, if we are walking in the light and confessing the sins of which we are aware, then we are covered by the blood for sins of which we are unaware. On the other hand, if we become aware of a sin, we must confess it in the manner required by Scripture to have forgiveness. Otherwise, that sin is no longer covered by the blood in terms of fellowship. God requires this confession in the case of known sins, both for His forgiveness of us and for our forgiveness of each other (at level-two forgiveness and above). If we refuse, “we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us,” and we are consequently walking in an unforgiven state in terms of fellowship. At this point, we would be walking in the darkness and be lying if we claim we are in fellowship with God. If we deny our sin after it has been exposed as such, “we lie.” I do not believe Sue was lying when she originally made the accusation. But if she persists in denying her statement to be sin after clear demonstration that her accusation was factually false, and thus sinful, then John apparently would call her a liar.

### Conclusion

Saul thought he was doing the right thing to persecute Christians. He was sincere. But while he was on his way “to Damascus to persecute more Christ followers, God knocked him off his horse and let him know he was sincerely wrong.”<sup>3</sup> God did not excuse Saul’s sin in the name of sincerity. God expected Saul to deal publicly with his sin afterward so that his sin could be washed away in terms of fellowship (Acts 22:16). I wrote DLAF to knock Sue off her horse, so to speak, to demonstrate that she was sincerely wrong. Her sin likewise must now be addressed as such via confession.

Now that her accusation has been demonstrated to be based on a false premise, she has no excuse not to own up to the fact that she made a false accusation. She might respond, “The accusations were false, but I thought they were true at the time. Therefore, I did not sin in speaking falsely.” However, even in DLAF, in discussing 1Jn 1:6-9, I made the distinction between sinning intentionally and sinning unintentionally. Unintentional sin is still sin. When it is exposed, it needs to be confessed as such. Furthermore, being *sorry* and being *sorry for sin* are not one in the same. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which entails confession.<sup>4</sup> Sue’s being sorry is not a godly sorrow in that it has not led to repentance and confession. Being sorry for sin involves confessing it as such: “I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin” (Ps 38:18; ESV).

We are not free to change the standards of Scripture. For instance, those pastors who are sincere in saying that homosexuality is not a sin are sincerely wrong. Being sincere in what they are saying will not make them guiltless at the Bema.<sup>5</sup> Intent does not justify their words if those words are not within the acceptable biblical parameters of biblical revelation. Accuracy in biblical exegesis is crucial: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2Tim 2:15). “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment” (Jam 3:1). Therefore, I seek to be as accurate as I can in what I say, and I expect the same from others. After all, God expects accuracy, and He expects us to follow His example in rejecting false words, such as false teaching and false accusations. Some are critical of requiring accuracy. The Lord will judge. To be sincere when you are morally wrong, makes you sincerely wrong, not sinless. Sincerity and honesty are no substitutes for accuracy. Intent matters. Actions matter. Words matter. Accuracy matters. Intent is a factor, but it is not the sole factor.

<sup>2</sup> Confession results in level-two forgiveness. Wisdom and liberty dictate whether level-three and level-four forgiveness are also granted. Even previous forgiveness can be revoked for repeated offenses. Therefore, the book-length discussion in DLAF was necessitated to address a variety of needs, such as helping to avoid repeated offenses.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Walls, “Be careful not glorify sincerity, we can be sincerely wrong about a lot of things in this life.” Available at <http://pastorbenwalls.com/2011/04/17/be-careful-not-glorify-sincerity-we-can-be-sincerely-wrong-about-a-lot-of-things-in-this-life/>. Accessed 5/29/2020.

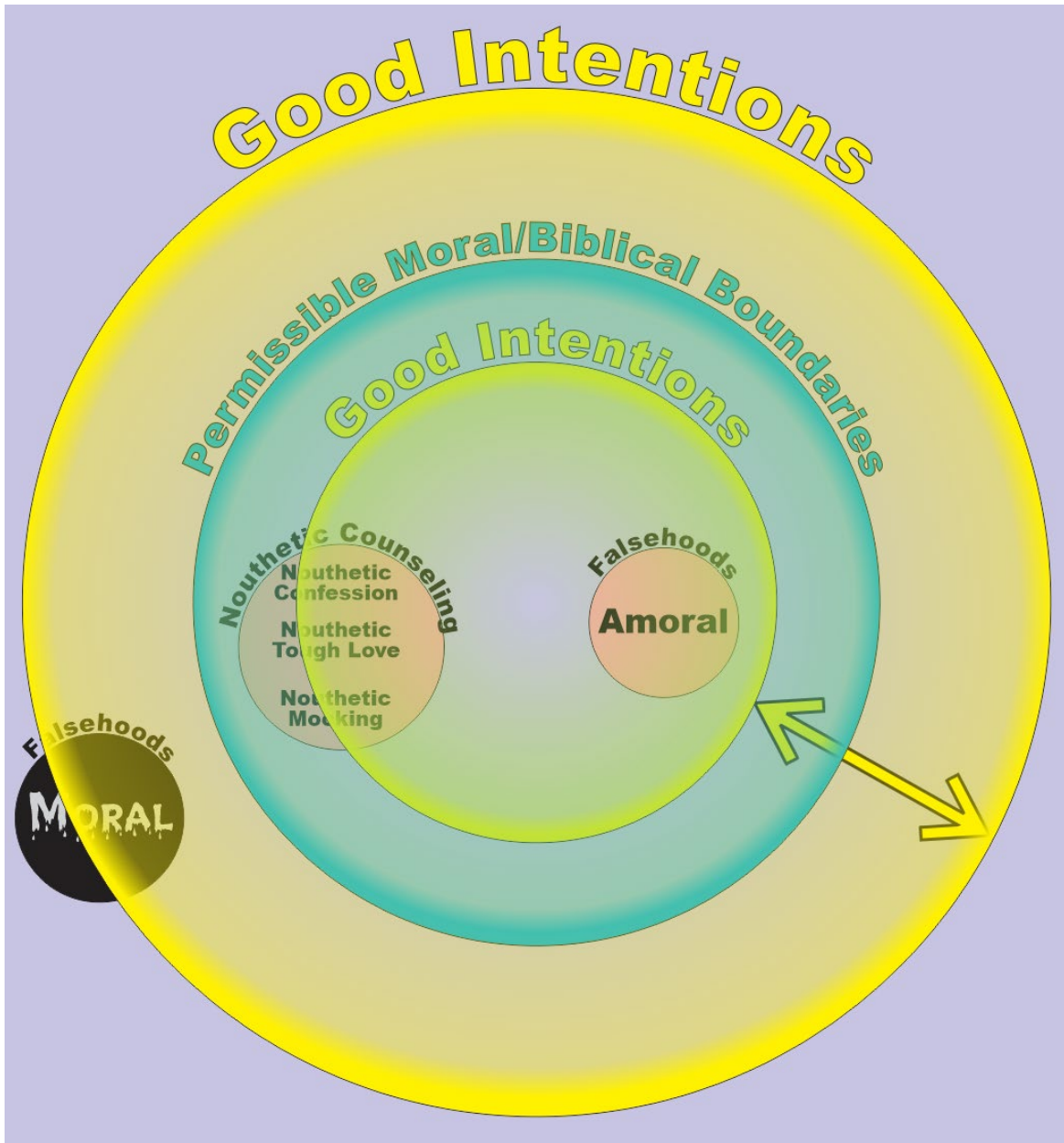
<sup>4</sup> Mt 27:3-4; Lk 15: 10-21; 17:4; Acts 3:19; 11:18; 26:20; 2Cor 7:8-10; 2Tim 2:25; etc. See MCMC.

<sup>5</sup> Staff writer, “Sincerely Wrong.” Available at <https://www.calvarygs.org/sincerely-wrong/>. Accessed 5/29/2020.

Advanced Discussion

For those readers who would like to probe this discussion a little more deeply, the following illustration is offered.

**Illustration 2. Boundaries and Intentions**



- *Good intentions* are pictured with yellow and as variable. The yellow arrow is used to show the variable boundaries of the yellow spheres representing good intentions. Good intentions can run the range from (1) falling inside permissible moral/biblical boundaries, to (2) coinciding with permissible moral/biblical boundaries, to (3) running outside permissible moral/biblical boundaries.
- *Permissible moral/biblical boundaries* are pictured with blue and as fixed. Their potential overlap with good intentions makes them appear greenish in the illustration. Nouthetic counseling (which entails such things as nouthetic confession, nouthetic tough love, and nouthetic mocking) falls within permissible moral/biblical boundaries. However, the implementation of nouthetic counseling may be inside or outside of the boundaries of good intentions.
- *Falsehoods* can either be moral or amoral. Falsehoods that are morally reprehensible fall outside permissible moral/biblical boundaries. Falsehoods that fall within those boundaries are amoral. Some morally reprehensible actions are done with good intentions. Therefore, the boundaries of good intentions must be variable enough to include those falsehoods.

To the extent my nouthetic actions were within the boundaries of good intentions, they were not sinful. To the degree, if any, that my actions were outside the range of permissible moral/biblical boundaries or outside of the range of good intentions, they were sinful. To my knowledge, my actions fall within both ranges and therefore are not sinful. However, allowance must be made that I may have sinned to some degree in either my actions or intentions, even if I am not aware of doing so. If so, then my unknown sins are covered in terms of fellowship with God and I have level-two forgiveness (1Jn 1:7). Yet, I may not necessarily be acquitted by God in terms of level-three or level-four forgiveness (1Cor 4:4-5).

To the extent that Sue's false accusations were within the range of good intentions and spoken truthfully to the best of her knowledge, they were not known sins at the time she spoke them. If they were spoken with good intent and believed to be true, then they were unknown sins. Therefore, she could not be expected to confess them as sins at the time, and they need not have hindered her fellowship with God if she were walking in the light at the time. However, now that her allegations have been shown to be false, they are no longer unknown sins and therefore no longer covered by a walk in the light. Confession is now required for level-two forgiveness since they are now known sins (1Jn 1:8-10).

To further illustrate the difference between a lie and falsehood and levels of forgiveness, I will point out that, after my release of DLAF, Sue read about a third of it and accused me of lying by claiming that my book was full of lies. Dianne went to meet with Sam and Sue and asked Sam if he thought I was lying in the book. Sam acknowledged that he did not believe that I had lied. Rather, he attributed our differences in perception to variations in respective vantage points. Once again, I do not accuse Sue of lying in her accusing me of lying. From her vantage point, she may be speaking truthfully in calling me a liar. If, however, her vantage point is mistaken, as other witnesses to the events such as Sam and Dianne attest, then Sue has spoken falsely in accusing me of lying. Although her slanderous accusation was not necessarily a lie, it is false—consequently a sin, falling outside permissible moral boundaries. Therefore, since it has been exposed as such, it must be confessed as sin so that level-two forgiveness can be granted. Otherwise, in compliance with Scripture, level-two forgiveness must be withheld.

As I noted in a correspondence with Sam, I can entertain the possibility that, although I have committed no conscious sin that hinders my fellowship with the Lord and even though I have been as accurate as I consciously know how to be in the book, there still may be actions or statements in the book for which I would want to be shown mercy at the Bema. As noted in the book, I do not claim to be infallible in my perceptions. I am not always right. Thus, wisdom would dictate the prudence of showing mercy when one can do so without invalidating the biblical standards. The way to earn mercy is by showing mercy: "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jam 2:13; cp. Mt 5:7). Still, even showing mercy must be done within permissible moral/biblical boundaries. Obviously, the verse does not say, "Mercy *always* triumphs over judgment." Clearly, God's mercy does not always triumph over His judgment, nor does He expect our mercy always to triumph over our exercising judgment. Mercy only biblically triumphs over judgment when such mercy can be granted in compliance with biblical standards. Otherwise, even showing mercy can be morally and biblically wrong. Even the exercise of mercy must be done within permissible moral/biblical boundaries and with good intentions. If mercy is shown outside those permissible moral/biblical boundaries, then, in such instances, showing mercy is a sin. Showing mercy is sin when God has demanded that judgment, rather than mercy, be shown.

If Sue will acknowledge her sin regarding the letter (since her letter was factually untrue and disrespectful) and deal with her letter in the manner demanded by Scripture, then I can accept that response and cover her other actions and statements raised in the book in merciful love so that I will be shown mercy at the Bema—if I should need it regarding this issue. Even though I do not perceive a need for mercy at the Bema regarding this matter, in lieu of 1Cor 4:4-5 it is better to be safe than sorry. Plus, even if I do not need mercy for this matter, showing mercy regarding it would be an excellent way to earn extra-credit mercy that could be applied to other matters.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, I will only show mercy in such a way that does not violate scriptural standards or confrontational counseling. For myself, I believe I have set forth the best course of action that I can take and thus plan to maintain this course of action going forward. Therefore, I do not wish to be misunderstood as saying that I will show mercy to future attacks or bouts of self-pity. As explained in the book, I have no intention of doing so. Others may take a more tolerating approach than I do if they deem that best. I made allowance for their doing so in the book. As long as they have good intentions and stay within permissible moral/biblical boundaries in doing so, thus not condoning sin, they are permitted to do so. Notwithstanding, I believe the nouthetic approach to be the wisest course of action for me to take. Also, given Sue's history of belligerent texts, I do not believe that texting has proven to be a suitable medium. Thus, I will keep her on my block list (thus not granting level-three forgiveness in that regard).

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<sup>6</sup> Scripture encourages us to show mercy so that we may be shown mercy. Showing mercy to be shown mercy is biblical, not self-serving. Jesus showed us mercy by dying for us. Yet, even Jesus did not die for us exclusively for the benefit we would derive from it. He also died for us for the benefit/joy He would derive from it (Heb 12:2). PS, Jesus did not die for us exclusively, but this inclusivity does not mean that His death and love are not for us individually.