

The Writing on the Wall

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### **Retail Judgment**

I started shopping just like everybody else did. I walked through the doors and was given a cart. Right from the start I was putting things in my cart. I visited the attitude department and was quick to pick up things like pride, jealousy, and self-centeredness. I picked up things and was not satisfied with them; after all, other people's stuff looked so much better than mine. I was a normal young kid, disrespectful and irresponsible. My parents tried to get me to buy some of that respect stuff, but it was not for me. After all, what is the point? My boss wanted me to get something called a 'work ethic', some kind of industriousness, but that was too hard. I did not want any of that. Of course, it would have been easier to get that if I had not gotten so much 'laziness' in the Habits department. Later on I went into the department labeled 'Sexuality' and I saw things like abstinence, celibacy, sexual purity, and loyalty to spouse; but, I passed those things over for the more exciting things like promiscuity and adultery – I did not go for the homosexuality, that was just too weird for me. I did not think I was such a bad shopper; after all, it was the busiest aisle in the whole store. There were people trying to warn me against things like that because the Cashier at the checkout would charge me for them and I would have to pay for it somehow, but who wants to listen to them, especially when the salesman was so helpful and good at hawking his goods.

Next I visited the V and V Department, Virtues and Vices, and I saw all kinds of cool things. There was this thing labeled 'Dishonesty'. I found this product to be very useful. There was also 'Honesty' – they say it is the best policy – but not many people were buying that so I left it alone. I was a pretty smart shopper then, I really stocked up on the grey area stuff; you know –the debatable stuff. After all, we all know that the end justifies the means! That salesman was working in that aisle as well, and he was very convincing. He was so helpful and nice, and honest even. He did not hesitate to tell me

which items were better than others. Every once and a while there was somebody else who tried to interest me in something called ‘Good Works’, but it was generally something stupid like loving my neighbor more than myself. What a silly idea! Any way, those things were not selling very well, and I tried to stay away from things that others were not buying. After all ‘go with the flow’, right? Several times there were even some other customers who tried to convince me to buy something called ‘Salvation’, but when I asked that helpful salesman, he said it was just a scheme and said only the foolish shoppers got caught by that net. I was pretty proud of myself; I was not a foolish shopper! I mean, it only makes sense. Everybody knows there is no absolute truth. No one’s values are any better or worse than mine. There will be no reckoning of accounts. I will not have to pay for my sins, if there even is such a thing. And if there were such a thing, I would have plenty of good things to cancel out the bad in the shopping cart.

I discussed this topic with other ‘experts’ who said that I could do a wide variety of things to eradicate that potential risk. I could do something they called ‘Confession’, this was where I found a certain person and showed him my ‘Sins’ in my cart and he would give me a ‘Certificate of Atonement’ which would pay for my sins after I did certain things he called ‘Penance’. I did this once or twice, but it was really all too much work for a chance anyway, so I stopped that. Another suggestion was called ‘Manufacturers Coupons’, these were things that were issued from the creator of the ‘sins’ that would reduce the price that I had to pay, some were even ‘free coupons’. I got as many of these as I could. Some of them carried names like ‘I didn’t know better’, or ‘my family raised me that way’, or ‘I am just a mindless product of my environment’, or my favorite ‘it is in my DNA, it’s not my fault’. One shopper saw what I was doing and told me that the Cashier did not accept those things, but I did not want to believe him – so I did not.

I continued on my merry little way, charting my course among the many other consumers shopping the retail giant affectionately labeled ‘World-Mart’. It really was a great place, something of a neutral place actually. It was built by the Cashier up front, they say. It used to be a perfect place, until a man and woman ‘sinned’ and then it became a troublesome place for the rest of us to toil and shop until we dropped. There

were all kinds of people shopping this place; of course it was the only place to shop. I even met a shopper who told me that he was an ordinary shopper like me once, but then he met someone who showed him the Guide. The Guide was a book that supposedly had all the answers and told of a special Man. It was written by the Cashier Himself, and gave the instructions for shopping at World-Mart. According to it, the only two ways to pay for our sins was blood or fire. It said that a special Man, the Son of the Cashier, came into the store and shopped just like us, but unlike us, He did not buy any sin. He owed nothing, but He paid the bill for all who would accept Him as their Agent of Redemption. They explained to me that my 'good works' would not help me, nor would anything else except this Man; without Him, my 'good works' would be worthless for they could only have value if I accepted Him and let Him help me to shop. I did not know what to do with this shopper and his 'good news', so I asked the salesman who had been so helpful to me all along, and he said that it was nothing but a myth from olden days, good to listen to but not very realistic. The enlightened shoppers knew better. So, I ignored this gentleman who shared with me what he called the 'good news', and went about my way shopping for other little goodies that would make me happy. I kept piling what others might call sins into my cart, and every once and a while I would put some 'good works' in there – just for good measure.

Finally, I heard my name called over the P.A. to go to the checkouts, so off I went – totally oblivious of what was about to happen. When I got up there I noticed two doors, one was on the right and said 'paradise', and the other was on the left and said 'torment'. There was a wall separating them that allowed you to see from 'torment' to 'paradise' but not the other way. I thought it was rather strange, but they were the only doors out, so I decided that I would go through the door labeled 'paradise' – a natural choice I am sure. There was only one man ahead of me, of which I was thankful. I do not know why, after all this was the only time I had ever been in line at World-Mart, but I just did not like the idea of waiting very long. Probably because I passed over patience while I was shopping, oh well. The man ahead of me loaded up all the contents of his cart on the belt and the Cashier began to scan them. As each item rung up, the screen would say 'Sin' and then a price. The funny thing was that all of the sin rang up at the same price, regardless of whether it was a little white lie, or a huge sin like murder or theft. If the item was a good

thing it rang up as 'Jewel' and then a price – only the 'Jewels' did not effect the cost of the total purchase. At the end, the Cashier totaled the order and asked the man, "Will you be paying with Blood or Fire?" To which the man responded confidently, "Blood." Upon hearing the response, the Cashier turned to a Man with scars upon his hands and side, and asked Him, "Do you know this man?" The Man with the scarred hands opened a huge book titled 'The Lamb's Book of Life' and flipped to a page as if He knew exactly where this man's name would be. He placed His finger upon an entry and said, "Yes, I paid for his purchase. His name is recorded in the book." With that, the Cashier tendered out the transaction as 'paid in full' and the man was escorted through the door on the right into 'paradise' by the scarred Man.

Next it was my turn, and after seeing how easily the man before me had fared, I was feeling quite well. I confidently stepped up and upon seeing that His name badge read 'Jehovah', began to introduce myself, "Hello, my name is ..."

"I know who you are. I have known you since before the store was built."

Ok, well that was a little unnerving, so I just loaded my cart onto the belt and let Him do His thing. And things were not looking good for me. My order was getting rather pricy and I was feeling a little uneasy about it. But I reassured myself that soon He would begin scanning my 'good works', and that should make a little difference. I was feeling my oats a little when He scanned my first 'good work'... except that it rang up as 'sin'. I was devastated, this ruined my whole plan! All those things I thought were good were really bad, I had to do something. So I challenged it, meekly. The Cashier stopped, and opened a book – it was the Guide! He turned to a page and showed me where it said that all my 'good works' were really sinful to Him because I bought them for the wrong reasons. I was totally crushed! Most of my 'good work' fell into this category, for I bought precious few things along the way for the right reasons. What was I going to do! I felt my heart sink, and then I remembered! I cockily handed my 'certificates of atonement' and my coupons in a nice fat wad to the Cashier and said, "Don't forget to use these." To which He simply said, "Those are not any good here." I just stood there, dumbfounded. What was I going to do? I had nothing! The Cashier totaled the order and asked me the dreaded question, "Will that be Blood or Fire?" I weakly murmured, "Do you accept the Ignorance card?" I was hardly surprised when He responded in the

negative. In a last ditch, desperate effort to save myself, I responded, “Blood.” The Cashier turned to the scarred Man, whose name badge read ‘Jesus’, and asked Him if He knew me. What would He say? I held my breath. Would He say yes? Oh, please say yes, I beg you!! “No, I don’t know this man. He was offered the chance to let me pay his debt, but he refused my gift. His name has been blotted out of the book.”

I dropped to my knees and cried for mercy!

“Mercy? I offered you mercy when I offered you my Son, but you in your greed and arrogance and lust chose to spurn my gift. There is no last chance for you.”

And with that He processed my order as ‘Fire’. The Cashier turned me over to the very salesman who had been so very helpful, and for the first time I saw his name badge clearly – it read ‘Lucifer’. He took me by the arm and dragged me to the door on the left. The door marked ‘torment’. And when he opened it, the heat that assaulted my face was like nothing I have ever felt. It was terrifying, I felt my mind leaving me and the panic and despair and fear and regret washed over me like a tidal wave. I could remain silent no longer! I wailed, I screamed and gnashed my teeth in total panic and horrid torment! As Lucifer threw me into that lake of fire, I could feel the heat that was beyond comprehension. The full knowledge of the truth that was now so crystal clear and the sight of paradise so close yet infinitely far away was more than I could bear. If only I had listened! If only I had...