

Discerning the lived difference... Guilt & Fear vs Grace & Freedom

From John: Please read this first:

The minute we try to make a list, the real **danger** is we may end up with what then becomes a new version of Guilt and Fear! There is no list against which we can tick boxes! The subtlety and horror of partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is, among many other things, that pretty well everything can be, and is counterfeited. There are obviously blatant examples of both Guilt/Fear and Grace/Freedom, but more often there are subtle nuances, and darkness loves to put on the clothes of light. Furthermore, Grace/Freedom definitely takes a very different shape, look and feel in each of us that is quite unique and contrasts with the shape that Guilt/Fear has taken, or tends to take by default. I think it is only a long and slow practice of grace-full reflection and conversation that will allow us to become more discerning. So, in what I write below, I am tentative and wary, so this is not for general distribution. What I have put into words in the table below is for discussion, comment, amendment and greater wisdom than I have. I give this to you at Lawson Baptist Church in the hope that — into the future — you will talk these things over as a result of our weekend on "One Anothering".

In writing this list, I've tried to make the definitive test what we know of Jesus — how he lived, acted, spoke and related — even how we might read him between the lines. But I have also tried to access my own stumbling journey, and with gratitude to so many over the years who have been real with me about their inner worlds.

No	Guilt & Fear	Grace & Freedom
1	The predominant reality will be shame with all it's debilitating effects on human functioning and relating.	For we fallen and being-restored image bearers, the <i>presence</i> and surprising, even disrupting richness of God's grace, evident in growth in faith, hope and love.
2	Pressure, control and conformity, with a burdened 'heaviness' about life.	Playfulness and delight, a 'lightness of spirit', and a glorying in the gift of our humanity.
3	A preoccupation with safety in the sense of 'getting it right' and the 'need to be right', under which is chronic and binding anxiety, even if masked under apparent 'togetherness' and competence.	An openness to risk taking and productive anxiety. Knowing that "there is nothing better in life than doing the ridiculous to accomplish the impossible for a God who is too good to be true." <i>Dan Allender, personal correspondence.</i>
4	Certitude, with 'answers' for most things. Often looks like smugness and dogmatic arrogance.	Uncertainty about lots of things, with growing convictions on very few things, and creative openness and freedom to explore, rethink, question and imagine alternatives.
5	KNOWING. A strong tendency to moralism, arrogance, judgmentalism, superiority and Pharisaism.	LEARNING. A deep humility and non-defensive 'not knowing', that listens and learns. It's knowing is <i>always</i> open to learning more, and being taught.
6	In the 'one and many' issue, a preference for the 'one', for sameness and predictability. 'Group think' dominates over thinking outside the box and delighting in difference.	A delight in, and preference for (at least relationally) the 'many', for diversity, challenge and newness. (Not the same as mere novelty, but, in the words of Jesus, 'Look, I am making all things new' <i>Rev 21:5</i>).
7	Predictability in conversations. Becomes boring. Leads to closure and lack of knowing one another.	Robust, kind and unpredictable conversations that lead in unexpected directions and are open, always with a relational concern.
8	A preference for the illusion of control over the messiness and anxiety of ever-growing relationship.	Playful openness to the messiness of life, and deep humility about the incompleteness of our knowing or control of anything important.
9	All the right words, but something missing in spirit.	A certain tentativeness about being "right".
10	Absence of seeking feedback and critique.	Vulnerable openness to feedback—indeed, a practice of seeking it.

11	Lots of accusation, blame and contempt. Quickness to assign people to pigeon holes and dismiss them or their opinion.	Genuine openness to owning one's own faults, and when angry a complete lack of contempt.
12	Emotional and relational detachment or 'stability' in it's many guises.	Emotional flexibility and lability. No need to fit in, conform, or live down or up to other's expectations.
13	Almost deadly seriousness and lack of play.	Within each different personality, regular humour, belly laughter, hilarity and even what might be thought of as 'irreverence' (the "holy fool"). Subversion of the norms of 'niceness'.
14	Lots of reactivity.	A growing willingness to stay quiet and involved despite the lure of reactivity. Significant ongoing progress in learning the difficulties of 'self-soothing' and non-reactive presence. "Of course he's not safe, but he is good." C.S. Lewis of Aslan in "The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe."
15	Poor judgment relationally and pastorally.	Discernment born of wisdom, with a slowness to accuse.
16	Distortions of manliness and femininity.	Deep appreciation that God created us "male and female".
17	Suspicion of, or awkwardness with human sensuality and sexuality. Dismissing of our bodily existence for some 'higher' reality. OR, an unhealthy preoccupation with these.	Delight and gratitude in physicality, the sensual and sexual, and the wider delight in aesthetics, art, music, poetry, literature and film.
18	A settled preference for 'having answers', and giving <i>explanations</i> for most things. "There is an enormous difference between the <i>joy of discovery</i> and the <i>passion to explain</i> . The former gives life a sense of adventure. The latter makes us hate mystery." Larry Crabb, <i>Connecting</i> , p. 112	A settled preference for 'asking questions', indeed, for <i>living</i> questions about LIFE, and (despite the anxiety involved), <i>staying open</i> because... "All that I know now is partial and incomplete..." 1 Cor 13:12
19	An unwillingness to look bad, admit failure and acknowledge flawedness.	A quickness to own one's weakness and failure <i>first</i> , before any sense of 'rightness'.
20	A 'tightness' across many dimensions of existence. Playing it safe, little sacrifice for others, or putting oneself out for the bodily, concrete needs of a neighbor.	Generosity of spirit expressed in word and action. Sacrificial love that bleeds for others, and is felt genuinely and deeply by those who are close.
21	A stance of superiority (through education, status, position, knowledge, experience or authority).	No need to impress, succeed, win, or be seen to!
22	Settled 'contentment' with the status quo, and desire to preserve what is, and what has been invested.	Godly dissatisfaction and longing for more. Little investment in self (apart from healthily wanting to grow in Christ), lots of investment in others.
23	Preoccupation with explanation. A creeping, insidious concern with rightness and orthodoxy as defined by one's inner ring. A cerebral discipleship.	Openness to mystery. A self-forgetful attentiveness and genuine intrigue with the story of others, and how God may be weaving his way in the lives of others.
24	Rigidity and dogmatism, even smugness.	Flexibility and quiet conviction.
25	Cover-up of failure. Love of control and power. Need to punish and expose the failures of others.	Willingness to bear the failures of others without any need to expose them. Greater longing for reconciliation and restoration, at personal cost.

26	Little social movement outside one's comfortable and secure relationships. Preoccupation with 'competence'.	Willingness at times to leave one's comfort zone and supposed areas of 'displayable competence' in order to love well and deepen bonds of friendship. A willingness to be seen as incompetent and 'not knowing' when it comes to love—indeed to be shown up as unloving.
27	"Sorry" used as a conversation closer, and perhaps said often. When used, said quickly and easily. No further invitation to explore.	"Sorry" used sparingly and with a genuine conviction and a willingness to see the wound that has been inflicted on another without explanation or excuse. "I was wrong."
28	Little curiosity. Most things are settled and known.	Being continuously and genuinely intrigued with a wide variety of life and living.
29	Agenda-driven.	People-centred.
30	Either crippling busyness or laziness.	Availability with a freedom to say 'No' and not assume responsibility for others where it doesn't fit.
31	Being a poor listener, but thinking of oneself as being a good listener.	Being (when <i>chosenly</i> available—not always), a good, rich, <i>present</i> listener. Genuine curiosity about others.
32	Some version of a "Messiah complex", being a rescuer and apparently eternally available.	Freedom to say no, to fail, to not speak, and to not help! (<i>None of us is of any help until we are free to not help.</i>)
33	Just don't 'get it' about life and the centrality of relationship. Don't see the unresolvable tensions of being 'outside the garden', therefore <i>waiting</i> for our redemption.	Genuine other-centredness without falling into the "Messiah complex" of trying to rescue or save everyone.
34	Rarely weep, or compulsively weep. Either avoid grieving, or live in it.	Beautiful honouring of genuine tears, and freedom to show one's own pain.
35	Something central around the reality of being life-giving is missing, or distorted, or singularly interpreted. They are more likely takers than givers . And you probably don't enjoy their presence all that much, unless your Guilt/Fear preferences happen to match in some mutually reinforcing (and sick) way.	With whatever personal differences you encounter, there is evidence that this person is ALIVE. He or she is 'there' when they speak to you, they bring themselves wholeheartedly into your presence. (Sometimes! NOT when they are distracted, sick or having an 'off' day). They connect to life in others, offer life, come alive, and the effect of being with them is LIFE-GIVING. People often feel more alive by having been with him or her. (The best definition of being 'holy'.)