

Love-based vs. faith-based religion

The true Gospel of Christ is that He died for everyone, not just some. The only price that ever had to be paid for our sins is the price that Christ paid on Calvary. The price was paid once for all. There are absolutely no barriers remaining that would prevent us from experiencing all that God has to offer, including His unconditional love and forgiveness, the healing of our physical and psychological wounds, and the achievement of a truly abundant life, if not in the here, then most certainly in the hereafter. When you add any kind of conditions onto God's love and acceptance, you erect barriers which for most people are insurmountable.

When I was young, I envied those who were able to believe in Christ without any doubts. I was taught that the one condition that was absolutely required for salvation was belief, or faith, in Christ. The problem is that most of us have trouble mustering up what we might feel is the required amount of faith in order to qualify. Exactly how much faith is necessary? Is there no room for any doubts at all? Does one's faith have to be in Christ? Are people of other faiths automatically disqualified? Do the prayers of non-Christians go unanswered? Does God only work in the lives of those who subscribe to and believe in a very narrow Christian belief system, which includes the belief that all who do not subscribe to it will be forever rejected by God?

The irony of this kind of thinking is that the type of belief, or faith, that is called for requires the believer to suspend rational thought and believe contradictory doctrines about the nature of God. We are asked to believe in a God of love who acts in very unloving ways. We are asked to believe that Christ paid for the sins of everyone, but that not everyone's sins are actually paid for unless they profess faith in Christ. How can both be true? We are asked to believe that God commands us to do something which He Himself is unwilling to do, which is to love and forgive our enemies and return good for evil. In some versions of Christianity, we are even asked to reject the clear truths of science and believe in the infallibility of Scriptures, which for me was an absolute impossibility.

An additional irony of this absurd kind of thinking is that barriers are not only erected between us and God, but also between one another. I spent most of my life in the evangelical Christian camp, and our main purpose in life was to share the love of God with non-Christians and lead them to Christ. For me, this led to conflicting feelings about people. I viewed non-Christians as not qualified to receive God's help and forgiveness, unless they could be persuaded to throw their brains out the window and accept without question many contradictory doctrines. I couldn't go up to them and say that God loves them just as they are, and so do I. I was taught that you are not really helping people unless your acts of charity also include the preaching of the gospel. Loving and helping people just for the sake of love was not enough. What is the point of helping someone to find a badly needed job or feed his family, if in the end he was going to spend eternity in Hell? How am I able to express unconditional love for the lost, in the name of Christ, knowing that Christ Himself does not love them in that way. How are non-Christians able to fully appreciate my acts of love towards them, knowing that there are "theological strings" attached?

I am so grateful that God has revealed to me that Christ truly did die for everyone and that everyone is already loved and accepted by God. The faith in Christ part is important, but this is

an experience that happens to everyone sooner or later. God is at work in our lives before, during and after our conversion experience. There are no time limits placed on when this can happen. God loves us just as much before we come to Christ as He does afterwards. The coming to faith in Christ part of our salvation experience is something that God accomplishes. It is a gift from God and not of ourselves. I am now free to love people unconditionally, and I do not have to worry about whether or not they currently profess faith in Christ. I believe that when I love people in this way they are more likely to perceive my love for them as genuine and not contrived.