

Freedom in Christ: Who am I now?

Do you ever have trouble with God? How do you respond when someone talks to you about “your Father God?” Here are some things that people believe about God – both Christians and non-Christians.

- He is distant and uninterested in me
- He is insensitive and uncaring
- He is stern and demanding
- He is passive and cold
- He is absent or too busy for me
- He is impatient, angry and never satisfied with what I do
- He is mean, cruel or abusive
- He is trying to take all the fun out of life
- He is controlling or manipulative
- He is condemning or unforgiving
- He is nit-picking or a demanding perfectionist

My best guess is that we can identify with at least one of those statements in some way. I have a friend who tells me that he doesn't have a problem accepting that God loves him. I believe him – I've watched him. Many of us have a problem with that though, don't we? That God loves me, that God loves me no matter what. Most of us, probably all of us, would love to believe it - wouldn't we?

There are certainly people God shouldn't love aren't there? That God loves me.... no matter what, surely can't extend to everyone. When Jesus sat down on a mountainside one day he challenged our thinking about who God loves, he looked around at the people standing in front of him and he said – God loves you! And you..... and you..... and you....and you!

God loves ... the physically repulsive, and those who smell bad; the twisted, the misshapen, the deformed; the too big, the too little; too loud, the bald, the fat and the old. The drop outs and the burn outs; the broke and the broken; the drug addict and the divorced; the HIV positive and the herpes ridden; the brain damaged, the incurably ill; the barren and the pregnant too many times or at the wrong time; the over-employed, the unemployed and the unemployable; the swindled, the shoved aside; the lonely, the incompetent, the stupid; the emotionally starved and the emotionally dead; the brutal and the bigoted; the drug lords and the pornographers; war criminals and the sadists; the terrorist, the perverted, the filthy and the filthy rich; the murderer, the serial killer and the child abuser.¹

We probably struggle with the thought that God could love them – but we struggle too with the thought that God could really love me. Truth is friends we're all in the same boat – you, me and everyone I just mentioned.

In Ephesians Paul reminds the people of the power of God's love in action in a wonderful passage in chapter 2. Ephesians 2 v 1-5 reads: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."

Truth is – this is true for all of us - we were dead in our transgressions and sins; we were spiritually dead – Adam and Eve and broken community - we once had no relationship with God; we once lived in a way that there was no possibility of living a full life – life as God intended. By nature we followed the ways of this world. By nature we are objects of wrath. Wrath is God's personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, his refusal to compromise with it and his resolve to condemn it. At this point it is hard to see that God could love anyone let alone everyone! However, there are two very powerful words that bring about an extraordinary transformation. But..... God.... (v4). The dream was shattered ... but God. Adam and Eve broke the relationship but God. We are by nature objects of wrath ... but God.

We may feel like, or be one of the outcasts; we may be bald or fat or misshapen or too old or too loud, a burn out or a drop out. We may be broken; a drug addict, or divorced or HIV positive or herpes ridden. We may be barren or pregnant at the wrong time or too many times, or lonely or abused or incompetent. We may have done some very stupid things, or be emotionally dead or hooked on pornography or be a criminal or be filthy rich. But God, but God, but God.

Ephesians 2 v 4-6 reads; But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms.

God is keeping the dream alive – always has been always will be. God's mercy reaches you and me, wherever we are and whatever we've done. We cannot earn God's love and we do not deserve it but the truth is God loves you; he loves you because he loves you because he loves you. God gives all this in and through Jesus Christ.

You can tell how valuable something is by what someone is willing to pay, and your Father God was willing to pay the highest price. And so Jesus went through:

- The frailty of becoming a human baby
- The shame of illegitimacy
- The terror of being a refugee
- The experience of an oppressive occupying power
- The learning of a trade
- The grief at the loss of an earthly father
- The direct confrontation with Satan
- The hunger from fasting
- The disappointment of unbelief in his home town
- The humility of washing dusty feet

The weariness of constant ministry
The frustration with his disciples
The misappropriation of money by a follower
The scorn and criticism as he:
 Befriended prostitutes
 Chose terrorists as disciples
 Had meals with corrupt businessmen
 Cared for lepers
 Did good on the Sabbath
 Ministered to non-Jews
The hatred and opposition of the religious leaders
The fickle nature of the masses
The ingratitude of so many he ministered to
The treachery of the betrayal by Judas
The agony in the garden
The temptation to avoid the cross
The loneliness as his followers desert him
The heartbreak of denial by his key leader
The injustice of an illegal trial
The lies and slander in front of Pilate
The mockery of Herod
The manipulation of the mob at his trial
The physical pain as hair was pulled from his face
The agony of the beating
The disgrace of human spittle trickling down his face
The anguish and shame of crucifixion
The curses of the soldiers
The insults of the onlookers
The gloating of his enemies
The revulsion of being made sin
The horror of death
The forsaking by his Father – the shattering of the Trinity
The permanent alteration to the Trinity now – Christ has a resurrected body in heaven.²

Through Christ you are a new creation. Because God loves you and Christ died for you, you are alive with Christ, and more than that – you are pleasing to God. You cannot earn God's love and you do not have to. In the world of broken community we spend all our time having to do things to receive significance, security and acceptance – we have to earn them. We have to continually perform and do well to gain significance. We have to do things to achieve or gain status and recognition. We have to do things to our appearance and to gain the admiration of others to be accepted. But in the restored community of God's love and Christ's death it's completely different. He loves you because he loves you because he loves you...

There is nothing you can do to make him love you – he already does completely and fully. There is nothing you can do to make him love you more than he does right now. There is nothing you can do to make him love you less. He cannot love you any more tomorrow than he does right now. He didn't

love you anymore yesterday than he does today. That is great news isn't it?!! In Christ we are pleasing to God. You are not saved by what you do, you are saved because of what you have chosen to believe. Friends, some of us, right now, are trying so hard to become what we already are. Living in God's love is not about "doing". What can I do to be loved and accepted by God? Nothing at all!! It is not what we do that determines who we are. It's who we are that determines what we do.

So what happens when the inevitable happens and we mess up? 1 John 2 v 1 says: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin...." What is sin? Sin is acting, thinking, speaking, doing that which is not pleasing and honouring to God. When we live in the light of God's love for us, we want to live in a way that is pleasing and honouring to God ... don't we? So live in such a way that you do not sin – says John! But we do.... don't we! 1 John 2 v 1 goes on: " but if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ the Righteous One."

Living in God's love and seeing ourselves as God sees us doesn't mean we are perfect. 1John 1 v8: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But if we sin, which we do and will, it does not change how God sees us or who we are in Christ. 1 John 1 v9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We do not live in fear of God's judgement – we live in his love.

Friends, true freedom comes when we live fully in the wonderful, magnificent, eternal, all encompassing love of God, the God who loves us because he loves us What you believe about God and who you are in Christ is vital. To live in the truth, you must accept the truth and here's the truth about your Father God:

- He is intimately involved in everything about you
 - He is kind and compassionate
 - He is accepting and filled with joy and love
 - He is warm and affectionate
 - He is always with you and eager to be with you
 - He is patient, slow to anger and he delights in those who put their hope in his unending love
 - He is loving and gentle and protective
 - He is trustworthy and wants to give you a full life: his will is good, perfect and acceptable for you
 - He is full of grace and mercy and gives you the freedom to fail
 - He is tender-hearted and forgiving; his heart and arms are always open to you
 - He is committed to your growth and proud of you as his growing child
 - You are the apple of his eye!
- Amen

1. Dallas Willard – "The Divine Conspiracy" Harper Collins 1998 p 123/124

2. Brian Hathaway – "Living Below with the Saints we know" Eagle 1996 Pg 23/24.