

201 *Totally unreasonable love*

I don't think anyone would argue with the idea that – at least in theory – the Christian faith is about living in a loving relationship with God.^[200] But how, in practice, does that affect our relationship with other people?

Totally!

First off, isn't it just brilliant when we meet up with others who are also living in love with Jesus! We have so much love to share, and their love encourages us if our love is ever flagging. Why would you **not** want to meet up with others who are following the Way of Jesus?!

And what about those who don't have a relationship? How do we relate to them?

Whoa, hang on! What did I just say there? I think we need to check that out. Let's go back to what I said last time: What is a relationship?^[200]

“Well, it's when two persons get to know one another, and each begins to feel that the other is really rather special.”

So what about Joan Smith? Does she have a relationship with God? I mean, she wouldn't call herself a Christian. No, maybe not yet, but what does God say about her? “Joan? Oh yes, I'm *specially* fond of her!” (Do read *The Shack* if you haven't already.)

I don't know about your church, but I was always taught that unless and until Joan “makes a commitment” or “prays the prayer” she doesn't have a relationship with God. But is that biblical?

Does God love Joan? Yes! Did God create Joan? Yes! Is Joan a child of God? Yes, I believe so. She might not know it yet, but yes, she is.

How can we help Joan to *realise* her privileged position as one-loved-by-God? Well, the starting point is us: we have to *show* her God's love. Anything else? Yes, it would help if somehow we could introduce her to Jesus, the human face of God. How can Joan develop her relationship with someone she knows very little about?!

And this is indeed exactly the gospel, as preached by the early church: the full story of Jesus.

So am I a universalist? Am I saying that everyone will be saved? Almost, but not quite. If you're a parent, and your child (of whatever age) is going wrong, do you stop loving them? Do they become not-your-child? So, until the very end, God will go on loving and trying to draw Joan by cords of love. Only by the ultimate, deliberate refusal can she cut herself off from God. So no, not a universalist, but a 'Godly love extremist' (or something).

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the son of her womb? Even if she could forget, I will not forget you!”^[Is 49:15] ... not to mention Hosea – **totally** unreasonable love! Even the Old Testament, where God doesn't get a good press, preaches 'Godly love extremism'.

Ours then (as God's) is to go on loving people, unreasonably.

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