

What is God really like?

What has so transformed my life this past two years? What has prompted this verbal outpouring?! I feel as if I've finally discovered what God is really like: God is love and, like a child, I have received that love and have been overwhelmed by it. (1 John 3 and John 14–17)

That's why I became a Christian in the first place – coming from a dysfunctional family, I saw love in action in the late 1960s in a Christian community in Yorkshire and was drawn to Jesus as to a magnet – but that love-based faith was soon overtaken by a 'knowing what is right' faith.

God showed me his love again in the late 1980s through a Colin Urquhart course, 'How to love and be loved', which bowled me over – but, over time, I lost sight of it. Then I discovered it again to some extent each time I read Yancey's 'What's so amazing about grace'; I must have read it four times, at a guess. I knew that book was important, though I didn't know quite why.

I lost it big-time when I got involved in a small sect, where love came to be replaced by total fear of not getting into heaven. I pulled out and tried to rebuild my faith, but I was still far from happy because all that I could find was the faith that most of us were brought up in: God is holy, I am sinful, sin separates, Jesus is the answer. It may be 'right' but it's hardly magnetic, is it?!

Then two years ago I 'discovered' love-as-Trinity, and in this seven-month writing journey, I have grabbed hold of God's love again, and I will not let it go – nay, Love will not let me go!

I now see the Bible, I now see God, totally in terms of love. I interpret every Bible passage in the light of the loving Father portrayed by Jesus, so if a passage seems to show God as condemning us or as choosing whether someone will go to hell or not I reject it – well, I reject **my understanding** of those verses. Usually, the problem is that I am interpreting it too literally, or I'm not taking account of the cultural setting of the writer and of the writer's immediate audience (very much a heaven-and-hell culture), or because I'm not allowing for Jesus' use of hyperbola – over-stating something for dramatic effect.

That's how I 'knew', the other day, that my friend was wrong to say that maybe God had not chosen that person. In my view, that would be totally out of character: the loving Father I have come to know would not **choose** to reject anyone. No way!

I have repeatedly called this 'faithful questioning': I have faith in God, and I believe that the scriptures are inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16,17), but I then have to discuss the more difficult scriptures with God and with you, my friends. This isn't an easy process, but we need to do it, for the sake of *les vingt* and our F&F. And anyway, God won't reject us if we get it wrong.

(If you want a **real** challenge, check out the scripture that's the origin of that quote about being chosen. I was shocked when I found it – it's actually Jesus speaking, not Paul as I had suspected. And I haven't yet worked out how to apply my glib principle above to that passage.)

Jesus was born into a religious system that was based on who's in and who's out, who's going to heaven and who's going to hell – and he fought and taught against that system. In his day, many people accepted the system, but many felt totally excluded – and it was they who were drawn by Jesus' love.

Thankfully, those like *les vingt* who have rejected Christianity, are probably rejecting the religious system that I too have rejected, and it's similar to the one that Jesus fought against. We can therefore have confidence that God knows how to draw them; ours is to show them God's love in its fullness, and then they will see through the false religion and be attracted to God's love in us!

I can confidently assert that **this is God's will for your loved ones**, and I'll pray with you that 'Thy will be done on earth'.

But in order for this to happen, those of us brought up in traditional Christian circles, will need to radically repent, to have a complete change of mind. We will need to stop thinking of God as a righteous judge trying to decide who is in and who is out. Instead, we must allow Jesus' teaching and example to take priority in our interpretations of the Scriptures, as we view God as a loving Father, longing for us and our loved ones (and our enemies, for that matter!) to come home.

Lord, let it be so!

Paul Bev. 8.4.19

If you want a sound theological basis for the views I'm expressing, please read 'A more Christ-like God, A more beautiful gospel' by Bradley Jersak.