

December, 2009

Indelible Love

When God loves you, it is forever. You cannot ignore it, walk away from it, wish it away, or think there is something greater waiting for you around the corner.

The same thing is true for the world. Two thousand and nine years ago, God left an indelible mark on human history. Humanity cannot run or hide; God sent a love into the world which must be recognized, considered, discussed and decided upon by every human heart.

In addition to being a mission mobilizer for Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, I am also an ordained pastor for the Presbyterian Church USA. Often, people share their lives and struggles with me. Over the years, I have noticed a familiar pattern. When a person has a direct encounter with God's love in one form or another, lasting a day or a decade, there is nothing that person can do to submerge the divine love that has been revealed to him or her. When God reveals himself to us, we are accountable for that revelation. God is always in relentless pursuit of our imaginations, souls and wills. Once we initiate even a small relationship with him, he will never let us go – no matter how far we might wander.

Two of my favorite songwriters are Bob Dylan and Van Morrison. In my opinion, they are both brilliant students of human nature. Both men later in their careers encountered and sang about God's love in Christ. Dylan and Morrison produced beautiful music about the Christian life. But sadly, both artists backed off from singing Christian-oriented songs and began pursuing other endeavors. But interestingly, as they did so their careers began to go downhill. The power in their voices was diminished and the end of their sensational careers was hastened.



None of us has anywhere to go once we have been exposed to God's love in Christ; it is the most beautiful, powerful force in the universe. In fact, the goal in life is to discover God's love – find it, or be found by it. If you think there is another stage of life or satisfaction beyond Christianity, you are wrong. In the book of Revelation, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid, I am the Alpha and Omega (the First and the Last)." (1:18) Much of the Old and New Testaments is dedicated to telling stories about people who either embraced God's love or tried to walk away from it.

In the book of John, when Jesus was beginning to emphasize the depth and importance of his teachings, the Bible tells us, "At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, 'Are you also going to leave?' Simon Peter replied, 'Lord to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.'" (6:66-68)

Before the Christmas season completely overwhelms you, take a little time to pray and talk to God. Sneak into a church, close the door of your office, take a nice, long walk and acknowledge to God that which he has revealed to you. Find a spiritual mentor. Ask your million questions. Empty your doubts and confusions. Cry and scream if you have to. God's mercy is indelible. It will never go away. It is best to embrace and follow it. Running from it, pursuing other so-called better endeavors in your life will only cause problems and heartaches, which sometimes take years to untangle.

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My heart breaks every time I remember my trips to Hungary and Ukraine. For the past 10 years, I have been traveling to parts of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. I have met with many Church leaders who tell me stories of life under Communism, which make my jaw drop.

I remember the Hungarian pastor who told me of the time he was hauled off to a concentration camp for seven years because a Communist official accused him of sharing his Christian faith with a young person, which then was against the law. Sharing faith with an old person was ok, but with a young person – that was against the law. This pastor was subjected to torture and a miserable life in a concentration camp. He told me how he survived many times when concentration camp officials would play Russian Roulette with the prisoners. The officials would give seven selected prisoners a gun loaded with just one bullet in one of the seven chambers of the gun. Each of the seven prisoners forced to play the game would get one pull of the trigger. One would die by shooting himself in the head while the other six prisoners lived. The brutality in Stalin's concentration camps left permanent, psychological damage that exists to this day across the former Soviet Union.



Hungary and
Eastern Europe

Even now, many bars in Ukraine are filled with men drinking alcohol early in the morning before their workday begins. Feelings are numbed and anesthetized. Brutal memories of the past are pushed away.

It's sad to remember that before Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Christianity was free and practiced openly. Now, Hungarians and Ukrainians are faced with the difficult task of reclaiming their faith despite the hurt and skepticism that runs through their veins. Can they trust Christ again despite the terrible pain of the last 90 years? Can they find a better, more complete philosophical or theological system than Christ's kingdom on earth?

We in the Western world sometimes struggle with believing in the spiritual or unseen world. For the most part, we are scientifically oriented beings. Christmas can easily become a material exercise if we are not careful.

The older I get, the more I believe that Christmas is the most special time of year. During December, our emotions are often cracked open. We are drawn closer to the spiritual realities that always surround us. We often tell people we love them. But, at the same time we can feel terrible about broken relationships and things that have gone wrong.



If God will never fail us, why in the world would we ever turn him down? Angels tell us to seek him. Shepherds urge us to trust him. Wise men counsel us to adore him. But in the end, it is our decision as to whether we follow him and stay with him, now and forevermore.

Merry Christmas and may you have God's peace in the coming year.