

Faith is Relationship

And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. (John 17:3)

Several years ago there was a story written about a small community in Kansas that prided itself in not having a liquor store. However one day one opened and the local church decided to begin praying that the Lord would just burn it down. Well, what do you know- one night lightning struck the liquor store and it burned to the ground. The owner of the store heard that the church had prayed for that very result and so he brought a law suit against the church arguing that it was the church that had caused lightning to strike it. The church denied any knowledge of the incident. The judge of course threw the case out ruling that the burning had been an act of God and therefore no charges could be brought. But, he did make this interesting observation. The liquor store owner had more faith in God than the church did because he believed the church's prayers had caused the fire, while the church downplayed their involvement.

We may chuckle at this story, but it speaks to the most important contribution that the church should offer to the culture in which she finds herself- the one thing that can make the most difference- the gift of faith. Our temptation is to reduce faith to a collection of theological truths that we cognitively believe, rather than relational trust in a personal God.

The debate is long and storied between absolute and relative truth. While evangelical Christians quickly defend the absolute position, we must remember a majority of people in our culture including those inside the institutional church do not share the same theology. What is easily defended is the relevance of a personal relationship with God. That possibility is attractive even to the most skeptical of doubters.

A love relationship covers a multitude of sins that continue to mark us as faith sojourners. Such relational faith is not lost through difficult circumstances or unanswered questions. God has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) His faithfulness makes possible our growth into faithfulness making the relationship with Him more intimate and more the absolute center of our lives.

Our theology will continue to be shaped and honed by our experience with Him. Faith as dogma is important to us, but doctrine without relationship is lifeless and is easily discerned as such. Faith is truth, because Jesus is Truth and knowing Him only validates it in our lives. The lyrics of one of my favorite hymns aptly illustrate this wonderful reality.

Jesus, my Lord, will love me forever,
From Him no power of evil can sever,
He gave His life to ransom my soul,
Now I belong to Him;
Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.

-Norman J. Clayton