

John 6: 35-41
Creekside COB
August 13, 2006

“Let’s Get Personal!”

One fine, early spring day during my senior year of college, Don and I were walking to the off-campus house we shared with four other guys. It was Friday, and we discussed the cultural and social events we had scheduled for the evening. In an abrupt change of topic, Don, the communications major said to me, the religion and philosophy major, *“I don’t believe that God is love. I believe that love is God.”*

College exposes you to different outlooks on life. You quickly realize there are more ways of believing than your own. You learn that you have a lot to learn. Beliefs you never questioned are put under the microscope, analyzed and scrutinized, and where necessary, replaced with beliefs that are strong enough to stand up to whatever life throws at you. As a great philosopher said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

“Don, how can love be God? Where did love come from? Love didn’t dream *itself* up. God’s love makes all loves possible.” Man, was my argument eloquent. My belief didn’t sway his, nor his, mine, and at the conclusion of our gentlemen’s debate, we went on about our business, no better or worse for our efforts.

The question I bring today is this—is belief important? Are there only two kinds of people in the world, believers and non-believers? Is something more important than belief, or is belief alone that makes us Christians?

Paul and his sidekick, Silas were in prison. An earthquake shook the prison so hard that all the doors flew open and the prisoner’s shackles fell off. Thinking all the prisoners had escaped on his watch, the jailer was about to fall on his sword when Paul stopped him. He fell at the feet of Paul and Silas and

cried, “What must I do to be saved?” They said, “***BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.***” In Ephesians Paul speaks of “the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who BELIEVE. The gospels and entire New Testament are saturated with references to belief. You cannot commit to something you do not believe in. As we believe so will we act. We would not be here if we didn’t believe that God has a purpose for us. We wouldn’t be here if we didn’t believe God would help us do a great thing.

Think for a moment about being “in” and being “into” something. The first we use when talking about what someone does for a living. “He is *in* construction.” “She is *in* real estate.” “She is *in* administration.” But when we say someone is “into” something, it means more. They are immersed-- like Myrtis is into needle point, John Zerbe is into golf, and Betty Yoder is into baking.

In New Testament Greek, the word used for “*in*” means, “*into.*” Believing into Jesus means I not only meet him at church. It means I take him home after church. I take him to work. I take him to the grocery store. He’s with me everywhere. Believing into Jesus means he exerts greater influence on my life than the Gettysburg Address.

But this distinction between in and into points to the insufficiency of belief alone. This may sound harsh, but God doesn’t want our belief. Jesus said that belief alone was no big deal. “Even the demons believe in God.” God doesn’t want our belief. We behave like college students, debating and discussing God—playing intellectual badminton with our images, ideas, and concepts, which, at the end of your senior year, or at the end of your life’s work, or at the end of life itself, doesn’t mean anything.

God wants more than our belief. God didn’t have to create the universe. God was complete, but God chose to create the cosmos. God chose to plant us on this wondrous little planet. God made us to be in relationship to him. The Potentate of Time that no one has laid eyes upon wants to get personal *with you.*

A while back, a notorious gangster was converted to Christ. It was a high profile conversion which got people talking and delighted the church where he was baptized. He said the right things. He believed the right things. But his lifestyle hadn't changed. It was clear that he intended to remain in the mob. His minister talked to him about it and he said, "Reverend, there are Christian politicians. Why can't there be Christian gangsters?"

Belief in God is just that—belief. Belief "into" God is personal. It's taking the big plunge—belief, commitment, all of you.

There is another man who believes. He is Jimmy Carter. His belief permeates every aspect of his life, from the halls of power he walked, to receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, to taking his turn at the little Baptist Church where he belongs, mowing the lawn and cleaning the toilets.

Let's spend less time talking about *believing in* God and get into a relationship. Erwin McManus says, "To belong to God is to belong to his heart... yet over the past 2,000 years the church has moved from a tribe of renegades to a religion of comforts. Those who choose to follow Jesus become participants in an insurrection. To claim we believe is simply not enough. The call of Jesus is one that demands action.

One way Jesus gets personal is by inviting us to dinner. He doesn't want to sit around having pleasant conversations about what we believe and why. We haven't been invited to discuss interesting Christian concepts. He hasn't invited is to come fill out bellies with bread. He has invited you to take the "bread of life" of which there is always enough.

The host is here, calling you each by name, ready to come into you through the signs of his body and blood, and become as personal as you will allow him to be.