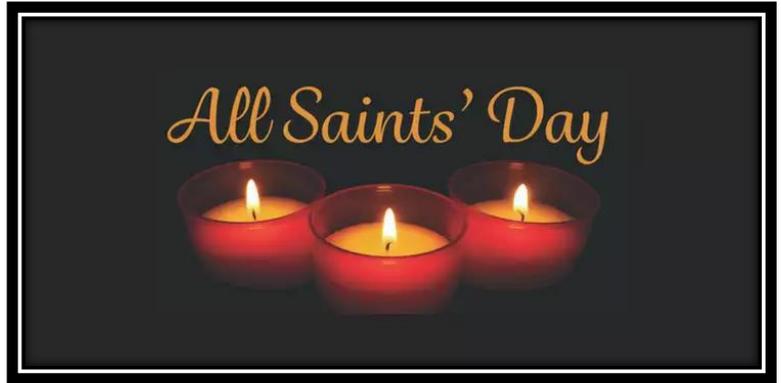


Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

October 30, 2018

I imagine that you know that “halloween” derives from “All Hallows’ Eve,” which is the night before “All Saints’ Day.” All Saints’ falls on November 1, and you may also know that November 2 is “All Souls’ Day”—a day to honor the rest of us who are not *officially* “saints.”

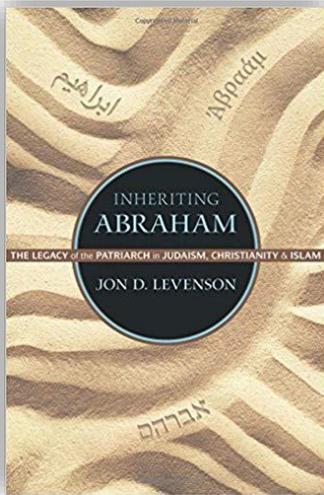


The word, “saints” occurs in the New Testament nearly 60 times, translating the word, “hagioi,” or “holy ones.” Baptists don’t recognize “saints” in the same way some other faith groups do, because in the New Testament, “saints” isn’t reserved for persons who are **ESPECIALLY** holy. The New Testament uses “saints” to refer to every single person who has been born again, and that probably includes . . . **you**.

I encourage you to reflect this week on those saints who have been especially important in your own faith journey, and if any of those persons are still living “on this side,” perhaps you can find a way to thank and to encourage them this week.

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On the second of three subjects for this week, it was my glad privilege to worship with Bet Aviv on Friday evening and to share the sermon time with my good friend, Rabbi Bernstein. This wasn’t officially a “pulpit swap,” but Seth had in fact brought the sermon in our service the previous week.



Seth had previously given me a copy of Dr. Jon Levenson’s interesting book, *Inheriting Abraham*, and suggested that he and I do a “tag team” conversation around Genesis 15:6, where it is written that *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*. Here was my opening statement for that conversation:

**A Perspective on Genesis 15:6 from one follower of Yeshua**  
*Abram believed the LORD,  
and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Rabbi Bernstein told you that tonight’s conversation would be about “faith,” “trust,” and “righteousness” as they relate to Genesis 15:6, and so it will.

Before I make a few comments to begin that discussion, I want to apologize to you, as I did to the CJC youth a couple of weeks ago, for all the mean and cruel things that persons who called themselves followers of Yeshua have done to the children of Israel for the past 2,000 years. There was—and is—absolutely no excuse for this behavior, and I am committed to doing everything I can to ensure that such things never happen again.

At the same time, I count it a great privilege and joy to be good friends with Rabbi Bernstein, Rabbi Starr, and with many of you. Thank you for allowing me to worship with you tonight.

Now, to return to Rabbi Bernstein's three terms, I want to first invite you to mentally rate your **trust** in God on a scale of 1-10.

Now, rate your **faith** in God on that same scale.

Now, rate your own **righteousness** before God on that scale.

And I want to add a fourth word to the discussion. Please rate your **love** for God on this scale from 1-10; and please keep all of these ratings—of trust, faith, righteousness, and love—in mind during tonight's conversation.

When Moses spoke to Israel in Deuteronomy 7, he told them, "*For you are a holy people belonging to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. **The LORD had his heart set on you and chose you**, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because **the LORD loved you** and kept the oath he swore to your fathers, he brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from the place of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt*" (7:6-8). Note the deep affection for Israel that God affirms in these words.

In the important theological novel, *The Shack*,<sup>1</sup> one thing that God frequently says is that "I'm especially fond of so-and-so." As we briefly consider God's love for Israel, can you imagine God saying "I'm *especially* fond of . . ." and then speaking your name? I mean, *really*?

What most of us tend to do in daily life is to make conclusions about God's love for us rather as we used to do as children when we pulled petals from daisies:

Something in the Bible inspired me today. *He loves me!*

My child is seriously ill. *He loves me not!*

Something for which I prayed actually happened. *He loves me!*

I let my anger get the best of me. *He loves me not!*<sup>2</sup>

And given such an approach, many of us go through life in a perpetual state of uncertainty and fear, never certain which God we'll meet on any given day—the one who wants to scoop us up in His arms with laughter and love, or the one who will ignore us or punish us for reasons we never understand. Our approach and our experience tend to reinforce each other, and many of us end up uncertain about what sort of relationship with God we actually have, if indeed we have one at all.

Wayne Jacobsen has described this dance of "*He loves me, He loves me not*" as a struggle with God's "favor line." The "favor line" is that invisible line or bar that tells us whether or not we've met enough of someone's expectations to attain his or her approval. Our parents had such a favor line, and we knew well how to work it. Each of our teachers in school had one; each of our friends had one in the past or has one now; and our boss has one, too. So, it's only natural to assume that God has a favor line as well – *He loves me, He loves me not*.

Unfortunately, our attempts to manage the favor line frequently cause us to end up where one teenager did when his father asked him what had happened in worship that day: "**Same old thing, Dad. God is good. You are bad. Try harder!**" And that conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> William Young, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Los Angeles: Windblown Media, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Jacobsen, *He Loves Me! Learning to Live in the Father's Affection* (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007).

causes many of us to spend much of our spiritual lives alternating between shame and fear—not a very happy place to be at all.

You'll remember that I asked you to rate yourself on your love for God. Fear and shame do not lead to love, nor do they lead to a joyful, trusting, faithful and righteous life.

Now the fear of God is not wrong—God told us in Proverbs that fear is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)—but it's only the *beginning*. Fear is the first rung on the ladder to knowing the wonder of God's love, but *love* is the *end* of wisdom. "If you don't love God," Jacobsen noted, "you would be well-served to fear Him. At least that might keep you from behaviors that will destroy you and others around you. ***But once you know how much God loves you, you'll never need to fear Him again.***"

My friends, I invite you to consider this possibility: **how do you think your life might change if you were absolutely convinced that God already loves you as much as an infinite God can possibly love?** Can you imagine how freeing it would be to know that nothing you can ever do will cause God to love you any more or any less?

This is what followers of Yeshua call "the Good News." Jon Levenson, in his book, *Inheriting Abraham*, commented on Genesis 15:6 that "Abram trusts in the promise despite its apparent improbability, and God reckons that powerful faith to [his] credit."

Followers of Yeshua trust in a promise that is at least equally improbable. We trust the promise that in the mystery of what we call "the Incarnation," God *made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The Good News is that Yeshua, our once-and-for-all Passover Sacrifice, has already atoned for every sin we have ever committed, as well as for every sin we will yet commit. Receiving the gift of His righteousness allows us to abandon our attempts to rise above God's Favor Line.

My friends, the Good News is that **God's love has already moved you above the favor line**; and **God is not keeping score**. Trusting and believing that this is true leads us into the joyful and loving heart of the God we had always hoped was really there.

We still do "good works," of course, but now we do them, not in order to get "above the Favor Line," not in order to become righteous, but in celebration of the freedom and joy that we experience once God's love has credited God's own righteousness to us and placed us above that line forever.

When Yeshua said, "*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching*" (John 14:23), what He meant was that if we get the loving right, the obeying and the law keeping will take care of itself. And so I ask once more: **Can you even *begin* to imagine what your life might be like if you were absolutely convinced that your Father in heaven already loves you as much as an infinite God can possibly love?**

*He loves me, He loves me not . . . He loves me!*



This week's third topic:

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None of us could have foreseen on Friday night when I made those comments that in just a few hours, the most horrendous act of anti-Semitism ever perpetrated on U.S. soil would take place in Pittsburgh. Last night's Howard County Vigil brought together about 1,300 citizens to stand together against such hatred and such violence.

Just last week, two people were shot and killed in Jeffersontown, Kentucky—where our family used to live—just because they were African-Americans. Just last week, a dozen or more persons across the country were targeted for attempted murder—just because they were Democrats (for the most part). And just last week, 11 persons were murdered while they were engaged in a worship service—just because they were Jewish. These tragic events remind me of these words from God long ago:

Ezekiel 22:29-31

29 The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery.

They have oppressed the poor and needy and unlawfully exploited the resident alien.

30 I searched for a man among them who would repair the wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land so that I might not destroy it, but I found no one. 31 So I have poured out my indignation on them and consumed them with the fire of my fury. I have brought their conduct down on their own heads." This is the declaration of the Lord GOD.

In these awful days, we who follow Jesus need to continue “standing in the gap” for our nation through our prayer. We need to **vote** in ways that give righteousness and justice a renewed chance to thrive among us. And we need to claim God’s promise that ***if my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land*** (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Gun violence claims **96 LIVES** every day in the U.S.

SEVEN CHILDREN AND TEENS ARE KILLED WITH GUNS IN THE US ON AN AVERAGE DAY

The infographic features a dark background with a house icon. Inside the house, a red square highlights a person being shot. Below the house, there are icons for a car, a laptop, and a smartphone, with a red checkmark in a white circle at the bottom right.

