



Mail Donations to 3225 Knobdale Road, Nashville TN 37214

Lifelines Outreach shares the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and by making disciples in the greater Nashville area.

February 2017

The article touched my heart, the struggle to live out our faith is real. The Rick and Bubba Radio Show is famous in Alabama and beyond. Rick and Bubba talk about their faith and convictions on their radio show. Rick has taken a stand on the Bible yet at the same time is providing unconditional love for his daughter. Tough thing to do in our day and age of compromise. Christians must believe that the Bible is true and live out the commands of Jesus in everyday life. We must pray for each other, encourage for each other as we live out the life of Jesus in a broken world. I wish I could sit down with a cup of coffee with each of you and tell you what I experience each day. God is surely working as we share Jesus and make disciples. Pray for us as we help people follow Jesus in some of the darkest parts of our city. Thank you for your financial support, we depend on you to help us keep moving forward. Remember to read the Bible and to pray every day. *-Richard Gay*

The false choice between the Bible and love—by Rich Burgess

When I read Brandi Burgess's column about being a bisexual woman raised in an evangelical home, I knew the backlash wouldn't be far behind. It wasn't hard to predict that the social media mob would cast her father, radio host Rick Burgess, as a religious fundamentalist more concerned about his own image than loving his daughter.

The attacks don't surprise me. The Bible--specifically Matthew 10--mentions this sort of thing. Families divide, children rebel, and persecution ensues as a result of following Jesus. Even though Christians are told to expect that, it's a rough reality. It's also not a new phenomenon. I was more concerned that the exchange seemed to set up a false choice: Faith or family, the Bible or love. I reject the sentiment that a Christian cannot believe that the Bible is true and demonstrate unconditional love at the same time. It's because I read the Bible as true that I really understand what it means to love in the first place.

Most folks don't have a problem with the idea of God's unconditional love. That part is easy to accept. I mean who is against the concept of love? What aren't easy to swallow are the Bible's exclusive claims about sin and salvation. That's where many either reject Christianity altogether or develop their own a la carte Christian belief system which accepts certain tenets, rejects others, and sometimes creates theological additions.

Rick Burgess takes the Bible at face value as do I and so many millions of others around the planet. If you don't, that simply means we don't believe the same thing. In America, that's part of living in a free society where the ability to believe and worship as you please is protected. I'd love to tell you I have all the answers about faith, God, heaven and hell. I don't.

The false choice between the Bible and love—by Rich Burgess

But having all the answers isn't a prerequisite for faith. If somebody wants to take shots at my beliefs, I'm happy to discuss. At the same time, I'm not going to fight anyone because we believe differently. That's also why it's strange when people demand that Christians, Muslims, or other faiths alter their beliefs to affirmatively endorse evolving cultural norms. My faith isn't an ideological fashion accessory that needs to keep up with the latest trends.

While the Bible does make claims about what's right and wrong, it also declares, "All have sinned and fallen short." That seems like a ready-made recipe for hypocrisy when the same Christians espousing biblical truth regularly fall short of the standard they extoll.

Were my faith a system of withdrawals and deposits into the morality bank, I'd likely be in the red. I sin. I fail. I fall. I simply can't achieve the Bible's flawless standard in spite of my efforts to reject my own rebellion from it. That means I can't fix what's broken in me...or anyone else for that matter. Thankfully, the gospel doesn't stop there.

The Bible is full of messed up people who reached the same conclusion I have about their need for God's redeeming love. They aren't hard to find. King David was an adulterer and a murderer, but also a man after God's own heart. Paul persecuted and brutalized Christians before becoming one. Noah had alcohol issues. Moses had a serious temper. They were deeply flawed and still played critical roles in the greatest love story ever told.

My faith is grounded in the notion that God loved even a broken wreck like me so much that he'd sacrifice his own son. That's a crazy amount of love that I don't deserve. Because I haven't and can't earn it, I'm humbled by it. If you feel unworthy, unloved, or like you're a mistake, you're not alone. I've been there. God's radical love was there when I lost my brother, it's been there through years of personal darkness, and it's never left me even when I couldn't see it.

That love continues to change me. For starters, I've gradually discovered the immense values of humility, mercy and empathy. That has come in handy during a time when many of us aren't treating people with differing political and religious beliefs very well. As far as I can see, that's what amazing grace is all about.

The right things I do aren't the result of willpower applied to a cold moral code but rather my response to God's love for me. That's why it's all right for me not to be okay, struggle and make mistakes even while I hold the Bible as true.

After thinking about it for a while, I don't need to defend Rick Burgess, myself or other Christians on account of our faith. Everyone doesn't share the same beliefs on a wide range of topics including religion, and we shouldn't expect that. I'm not going to shame anyone who disagrees with me, thump them with my Bible, or shout them into religious submission. My goal is simple: I want others to see what I believe by the way I love and serve them when I have the chance. If I do that, maybe then I'll get an opportunity to tell them my redemption story.

Cameron Smith is a regular columnist for Al.com.

Contact Richard Gay at 615-838-0367 or at lifelinesoutreach@gmail.com