

## Acceptance and Spiritual Growth

A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory or absurd and yet is true. In divine paradox we often find two statements that seem opposite yet both are equally true. This month and into February I want to explore a series of divine paradox statements. The first is this: God loves us just as we are, no need to change AND it is our nature to change and our purpose to grow in spiritual understanding to discover and express more of our true nature.

We want to complain that both statements can't be true at the same time. EITHER I am ok the way I am OR God wants me to constantly be changing and growing to gain approval. And some of us end up choosing one statement or the other as more true but we'll see later how this can lead to imbalance in our lives. But let's start at the beginning. How do we arrive in this world?

Genesis 1:27, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Setting aside the gender pronoun, we are created in God's image; not flawed, not unequal, not in need of redemption. We arrive as God's beloved creation.

Tell an infant that God loves her just the way she is and she will stare back confused that you could think otherwise. Yet we do sometimes think otherwise. Even at their birth we begin judging and cataloging flaws in little beings. When my daughter Sarah was born a resident or doctor in training went out to speak to my family. He gravely informed them that the baby was a girl who was profoundly deformed and they should prepare themselves. My mom and cousin and friends were aghast and anxious to see the baby. The resident was shocked when my mom was allowed in and loudly exclaimed, "Oh Thank God! She's perfect; she looks just like her mother!" He was quite red-faced when he later confessed and apologized to me.

But it happens. We grow up judged by others and our personal inner critic adopts its own criteria. We develop our concept of God and our relationship with God. Every year we make resolutions about how life will be better. We seek approval and come to believe that there is always something we have to change to gain the world's approval, our parent's approval or even our own approval.

Then one day we come to a Unity church. Often what strikes us most at first is the concept of our own divinity. That Unity believes there is a spark of God, an essence of perfection within each one of us. Depending on how we have been raised and what we currently believe about ourselves, this can be a welcome surprise. And somewhat unbelievable! So we may find ourselves focused on this for awhile. Could God really love us as its own creation? Were we truly created in the image of God? ALL OF US? Could we really be acceptable to God just as we are? What kind of God is this? Well, it is NOT an anthropomorphic or man-like God that judges and condemns. It is the pure energy of love and creativity out of which we are formed. As we wrestle with the idea that God accepts us just the way we are, we should also be learning the TRUTH of who we are. That image and likeness of God is our God-self, the Christ of our being, our higher self. This is the part of us that never changes. It is the eternal beingness of love that we have always been, before and after we take on human form.

What about that humanity? Our God-self is always within us but is it always in charge? Humans are given free-will. We have minds that can choose and reflect. Have you ever noticed, paused long enough to let the observer observe, how you choose? When I notice, here is what I can see. Sometimes I just react to what my sense consciousness tells me. A car in front of me stops and I slam on the brakes. I don't really think too much about it but I have chosen. Now imagine someone is rude to me in a store. I have more time. Sometimes I can still react to what sense consciousness tells me. It tells me I am being threatened, ego is in danger and I must fight or flee. But I can also respond from what my God-self tells me. What if this person is having a bad day? My ego is not in danger because I am already loved and perfectly whole. I can respond with patience and compassion, not allowing myself to be harmed or demeaned but also not taking the other person's actions personally.

These examples of how we choose are the second part of the statement. Change is the very nature of life on the earthly plane. We are constantly changing, cell by cell, day by day. Our spiritual path is to discover more of the truth of who we are and express our true nature. It is a funny path on earth that seems to place us here, fully aware of our divinity; train us up with judgments and criticism and then allow us to unlearn our way back to how we

arrived, fully aware of our divinity. It is clearly not changing the Truth of our being; that is unchanging. But it may involve changing some of our behavior as we seek to express more from our true nature.

So what happens if we were only partially listening in church and we believe that if God loves me just the way I am, it is permission to act badly?

Acceptance means I never have to change and there is nothing to improve; not just about the Christ of my being but there is nothing to improve about any aspect of my being. I may have a bumper sticker that says, "God loves me but everyone else thinks I'm a moron."

Does everyone here know the story of David and Goliath? David is a young boy who slays the giant that everyone else is afraid of. David, in his innocence, is deeply connected to his true nature and is powerful because of his ability to draw upon his God-power. Now David grew up and learned more and more the ways of humanity. He listened more and more to sense consciousness. He was beloved of God and he had that acceptance down pat. Then one day he, the king of the land with many wives and great wealth, looked down and saw a woman bathing on her rooftop. He sent for her and spent time with her. Her name was Bathsheba. She was no floozy but you cannot disobey the King. She was in fact married to Uriah, a soldier in David's army who was away at war. Now it gets complicated when Bathsheba is going to have a baby. I'm going to skip to the drama in which David orders that Uriah lead the next battle and is of course killed. Bathsheba mourns but is moved into the King's house.

Now God sends David a friend with a wake-up message. Nathan comes and tells David a little story. We find the story in 2 Samuel 12: He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die;

he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

So David recognizes the folly of his own behavior. In the Old Testament what happens next is told as caused by the wrath of God against David. As we understand it metaphysically, it is simply the order of principle manifesting itself. Is anything of sense consciousness lasting? No. Are the fruits of deception and deceit sweet? No. And so in the story David and Bathsheba's child becomes ill and dies. We should not take this literally. A child's death is not God's wrath NOR is it punishment of a parent's folly. The story is about David having taken away what he obtained by acting outside his true nature. It is about David taking for granted his acceptance by God and forgetting that his journey also included acting from his God-self and learning more and more about that.

The Metaphysical Bible Dictionary says Bathsheba means "seventh daughter" or measure of fullness. David was given a painful lesson but he learned. He grieved, he fasted and he started over with Bathsheba. This time the love was true and the child was named Solomon which means "whole and complete".

There is a balance needed in divine paradox. Both statements are true. We must find a way to hold them both, one in each hand. We must give them equal weight and attention. David began fully aware of his divinity and feeling loved and accepted by God. Then he grew in the ways of the world and he forgot how to act and choose guided by his God-self.

I have seen what happens also when someone is so focused on policing her own behavior that she forgets that she is already loved and accepted just as she is. She does not have to earn God's love or work her way up to it. She does not get acceptance after reading so many books and taking so many classes. Acceptance is already our birthright. Discovering more of our true nature and how to express that is a journey.

So how do we hold this paradox, one end in each hand?

First, wake up and affirm, "I Am God's beloved child!"

Next, remind yourself throughout the day, "I choose to act from my God-self, from my true nature." Then see how you're doing with your choices at the end of the day. Tomorrow is another day!