

Everyone Belongs to God: Discovering the Hidden Christ

Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt

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This century-old advice to a missionary remains timely today.

Everyone Belongs to God is a thought-provoking compilation of letters written by German Lutheran pastor Christoph Blumhardt (1842-1919) to his son-in-law Richard Wilhelm as Wilhelm was preparing for missionary work. Although the writings are over one hundred years old, Blumhardt's passionate pleas for Christians to remember that God loves everyone, not just Christians, remain relevant today.

Blumhardt explained that missionary evangelism had lost its focus and turned away from proclaiming God's kingdom and was too concerned with imposing Western values and denominational doctrines. He stressed to his son-in-law the importance of showing love to every person, whether or not he agreed with their beliefs or cultural leanings. Only by gaining a person's trust through acts of love and a sincere interest in relating to him without condemnation would the true gospel of God's kingdom be manifested: "The principle of mutual understanding between people, with their different needs and circumstances, is what will put an end to social strife and religious rivalries and jealousies."

The letters cover a variety of topics, and the chapters have been arranged by general admonitions, such as "Keep the Kingdom in View," "Avoid Being Religious," "Remain Among the People," and "Always Hope." Blumhardt was adamant that Wilhelm become engrossed in the daily lifestyle, customs, and activities of the people he ministered among and not allow his own cultural or religious biases to taint his interactions with them. He also emphasizes the need to serve and encourage fellow Christians, regardless of any theological conflicts there may be between their respective beliefs: "God only reveals himself as the one, holy God through the deeds of the Spirit, which no amount of piety or learning can replace."

At times, Blumhardt seems to contradict himself, but his overall message that God's love, justice, and truth must be demonstrated by believers remains clear. *Everyone Belongs to God* reveals Blumhardt's concern that Christianity cannot simply be a religion of rules and customs, but must be a living example of God's presence and his kingdom on earth.

JEFF FRIEND (Summer 2015)

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