

"God is love, but..." Nothing!

Brad Jersak

"Everything before the word 'BUT' is meaningless."

I've heard the above quote elsewhere as *"Nothing someone says before the word 'but' really counts,"* and especially when an affirmation of love is immediately followed by its negation. The aphorism is loaded with wisdom and experience. Even if you feel that love compels you to bring a word of critique or correction, *if you use love as your opening salvo to bring someone down, you'll bring love down with them.* It's a major relational mistake... unless it's a case of deliberate 'gaslighting,' which is simply abusive.

How much more so with God! Does Jesus say, *"God so loved the world BUT..."* (John 3:16)? Did John say, *"God is love BUT..."* (1 John 4:16)? No. God's love is unconditional. God loved us *before* we ever loved God (1 John 4:19). Christ died for us even when we were *powerless* and *ungodly* (Romans 5:6-8). God even reconciled us to himself while we were still *hostile* toward God (Romans 5:10).

So, while God's love certainly does call us to reciprocate in love, trust, surrender, and obedience (see John 14:15 for example), that's an *"if..., therefore"* willing response. *Not* and *never* a caveat "BUT." In truth, our failure to respond in kind does *not* annul God's love, grace, or forgiveness. God's mercy endures how long? *Forever!* And since that is true, and no BUTS about it, of course we're called to orient our lives toward perfect Love.

If you have been told *"God loves you, BUT,"* it's possible that you've received a dose of spiritual abuse that we associate with *"Christless religion."* Or perhaps

you've afflicted others with your own version of *"God is love BUT..."!* In either case, this cartoon by David Hayward has just the solution. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all too happy to remove whatever BUT is sabotaging your experience of the Good News that *"God loves you BUT nothing."*

As one friend put it, *"The only 'but' I care about is Ephesians 2:4— 'BUT GOD... who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...' So God has a big 'but' too!"*

Who knew! But Amen! □

Brad Jersak serves as pastoral scholar of Plain Truth Ministries.

