

THE LOVE OF GOD:

CONDITIONAL or UNCONDITIONAL?



Today's professing church, particularly among the so-called "Spirit-filled," has been Biblically dumbled-down. Sensationalism is preferred over substance, while the people languish without truth. Sadly, modern Christians have adopted a quick-fix, bumper-sticker theology. In spiritual slothfulness, we're a people who have been indoctrinated by popular religious clichés. Two examples quickly come to mind...

"Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven"

"Don't judge me, God's not finished with me yet"

Likewise, there are many *sacred cows* rooted in a simplistic view of God's love. In this article, we will, by God's Word, answer the question: *God's love*, is it *conditional* or *unconditional*?

Proverbs 8:17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

John 3:16-18, 36 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God...He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Now, in these two passages, we have what appears to be conflicting presentations of God's character. Immediately, a question comes to mind, "is God's love conditional or unconditional?" Now, we know that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; God's Word is infallible, and it contains no contradiction. How can we then, reconcile these two, seemingly conflicting expressions of God's love?

FIRST, THE ONLY *DIVINE LOVE* IN THE SCRIPTURES THAT CAN BE REFERRED TO AS ‘*UNCONDITIONAL*’

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The love expressed in *John 3:16* can be referred to as God’s general benevolence. In the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the love of God was and is demonstrated to all mankind, past, present, and future. In Christ’s brutal death at Calvary, God’s love is extended to all but will only be experienced by few.

1 John 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

God, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, testifies of His willingness to forgive, restore, and bless even His enemies. This act of love was universal on God’s part; undeserved and unmerited on our part. Thus, the divine love through the atoning work of Christ is unconditional in the sense that it is extended to all. From the cross, and the cross alone, God has made this one, single, solitary, loving appeal to rebellious mankind. However, every other Divine gesture apart from Calvary, expresses fiery indignation.

“The great miracle of God is that He forgives sin, and it is the death of Jesus Christ alone that enables the Divine nature to forgive and remain true to itself in doing so. It is shallow nonsense to say that God forgives us because He is love. When we have been convicted of sin we will never say this again. The love of God means Calvary and nothing less; the love of God is spelt on the cross and nowhere else. The only ground on which God can forgive me is through the Cross of my Lord. There His conscience is satisfied. Beware of a kind and pleasant view of the Fatherhood of God: God is kind and loving that He will forgive us. This sentiment has no place whatever in the New Testament. The only ground on which God can forgive us is the tremendous tragedy of the Cross of Christ; to put forgiveness on any other ground is unconscious blasphemy.”

-Oswald Chambers

God the Father sent Jesus: in this sense, and this sense alone, God loves sinners. He wishes their highest good. God was not required to redeem mankind, nevertheless, true to His character, He exhausted every divine means to do so.

2 Corinthians 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself..

Reconcile: (*Webster's*) To call back into union and friendship the affections which have been alienated; meaning to restore to relationship.

Jesus has come, Jesus for sinners has suffered and was slain, now, the *ball is in our court*, so to speak. However, there are specific conditions of the Gospel that must be met if we are to experience God's love, namely, repentance, faith, and submission. Hence, if sinners reject God's love demonstrated in Christ, they clearly choose to face God on the ground of rebellion.

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

We will either embrace God in the person of Jesus as merciful Savior or we will face Him as righteous and holy Judge. What about the pop theological concept, "*God hates the sin, but loves the sinner*"?

"Deal with the sin and not the sinner is a maxim of popular acceptance, but like most popular maxims when adopted by the pulpit it makes sad havoc of truth and righteousness. The sin and the sinner are inseparable. Sin is not an abstract entity. It has its being through the sinner. Sin is not an accountable thing. The sinner is accountable for the sin. The only way sin is destroyed is through the sinner. We reach sin when we reach the sinner. Our gospel is a personal gospel. 'Thou art the man' is the epitome of its purpose. To separate and purge the person from his sins is the chief aim of the gospel." -E.M. Bounds

God desires that all men come to repentance, however, He is not pleased with them.

Psalm 7:11 ...God is angry with the wicked every day.

Today, many have been led to believe that God loves all men indiscriminately and that He hates no one, this is untrue...

Leviticus 20:23 And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.

Abhorred: (*Hebrew*) *koots*, To be disgusted with, grieved with, and to loathe.

Deut. 32:16-20 They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the Lord

saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

Psalm 5:5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

*Psalm 10:3 For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom
the LORD abhorreth.*

*Psalm 11:5 The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his
soul hateth.*

*Psalm 18:25-26 With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou
wilt shew thyself upright; With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward
thou wilt shew thyself froward.*

*Psalm 50:22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be
none to deliver.*

That God hates not just sin, but the sinner is a well established fact of Scripture.

*“God hates the sin, but loves the sinner’ is nowhere found in the Bible! This effeminate concept of God is typically propagated by lukewarm, ear-tickling, sin-justifying, counterfeit, sissified, ‘evangelists’, who are willfully ignorant of the Fearful God of the Holy Bible! They have no concept of the justice of God! They imagine that God is going to weep and cry as he mercilessly casts the wicked into hell. But No, the Bible says God is going to laugh when the calamity of the wicked comes upon them like a whirlwind! He will rejoice over the rebels to destroy them as they bow the knee and confess Christ is Lord! Oh! How God loves justice! Justice is an attribute of Love. A Judge in a courtroom of justice rejoices to catch the criminals and convict them. Is it because he is unloving? No! If he is loving, he will be glad the rapists, murderers, car thieves, child-molesters are sent to jail: for the greater good of society. God hates sinners in the same sense a Judge would hate criminals...not because God is hateful, but because He is benevolent. For the greater good of the universe, He will rid the earth of all rebels and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and Christ, and He shall reign forever, not because God is unloving, but because He is loving!”
-A wise preacher*

How then, does this truth effect our Gospel message? If we polled the Evangelical church-world with the question, “*How would you sum up the Gospel in a phrase?*” Sadly, they would universally reply, “*Jesus loves you*”. However, this is only a half-truth. Popular statements

like, “*God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life*” sadly only communicates half of the story and subtly gives the impression God is somehow pleased with sinners. It may even lead many with the impression that God accepts sinners apart from repentance and faith. Yet, when reading through the Gospels, *Jesus*, nor the *Apostles* ever utter words of this sort.

So, are we to tell people, ‘*God loves*’ or ‘*God hates*’ them?

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

To tell someone either ‘*God hates you*’ or ‘*God loves you*’ without qualification, in both cases, misrepresents the truth. We are to present the Gospel truth and all the truth. We must preach the law to expose the sinner's guilt before a holy God. We must declare the righteousness of God's judgment against sin and His displeasure with rebellious transgressors. And yes, we must, to those who are convicted and broken by their crimes against God, unveil God's Christ as the only remedy for their sin.

Gospel means ‘*good news*’. People often comment, “*If God hates sinners why then is the Gospel referred to as good news?*”

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

Indeed, the Gospel is *good news* from a Biblical perspective. How else would we expect God to refer to His own wonderful plan of redemption? When a local official declares there will be a crack-down on crime, promising to punish those who violate the law and pardon former criminals who are reformed, certainly this is ‘good news’ for law-abiding citizens. However, not so much for those who are committed to break the law. So it is with the Gospel. Surely every angel and every saint, call the *Gospel*, ‘*good news*’, but what of Satan, what would he call it? Would he not say it was very bad news? Indeed, he would, and is this not because he is in opposition to God? Therefore, it is only logical to conclude that those who reject Jesus Christ, preferring their sin to the truth, would refer to the Gospel as horrible news.

*1 Corinthians 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the
Greeks foolishness...*

We must remember, in preaching the Gospel, we are calling rebels to lay down their spiritual arms against a holy and loving God. We must leave them with two, distinct impressions: *there is hope in Jesus, but there is absolutely no hope without Him.*

Jeremiah 23:16-22 Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

The Bible clearly teaches that God's love is unfailing, undeserved, and unilateral, but never that it is without condition.

FINALLY, CONSIDER THE 'CONDITIONAL' LOVE OF GOD

Proverbs 8:17 I love them that love me...

The love expressed in *Proverbs 8:17* alludes to God's *relational love*.

Psalms 25:10 All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

There is a difference between God's *covenant love* and His universal, *benevolent expression of peace*. The *relational love* of God is strictly *conditional*. Such love is only realized through the blood covenant of grace, therefore, only Christians enjoy such love. Sinners have no personal experience with this type of divine love. We cannot know God and His love unless we cease to love sin. God wants our love to be a free expression from our heart. Thus, God invites, persuades, pleads, and beckons man to leave his idolatry and follow His Christ. If man complies, God delights in him, if not, man suffers the divine consequences. Should God delight in Hitler and Moses alike? Should God be pleased with Judas Iscariot and John the Apostle the same? As long as sinners reject the love of God shown in the bloody cross

of Christ they cannot receive God's conditional love. As long as they break the Law, they break the Lawgiver's heart, and cannot be in loving fellowship with Him. As long as they continue in their transgressions, they are at war with God Almighty and under the condemnation of His justice. Hence, instead of informing the lost that, "*God loves you*", it would better to merely say, "*Though you are wicked and worthy of the most severe divine retribution, God sent Jesus to die for you!*" In reality, the issue is not the fact that God loves humanity, for this is commonly accepted even among infidels. The more basic question that must be raised is, "*Does humanity love God?*"

John 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Therefore, we can conclude, the Bible, by strict definition, teaches no such doctrine as '*unconditional love*'.

–B.W.