

THE



"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

August 2024

No. 464

GOD'S (UN)CONDITIONAL LOVE

Is God's love for us purely unconditional and without a need for us to fulfill any requirements? Many make the claim that God's love, and thus Jesus' love, is bestowed upon us no matter the course of our actions or decisions. In fact, many will argue that their sins and sinful lifestyle are supposed to be accepted by us, because God and Jesus loved all. These same people will both justify their immoral choices and refute those who point out their sinfulness under this argument. We have seen a litany of sins defended in public under this claim that such sins cannot be condemned, because God loves all. For

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instance, some politicians have defended abortion as a moral right since God loves even those choosing to get an abortion. Although such people and these arguments seem far away from us, the consideration of God's love as unconditional affects us in daily interactions and on a personal level. If we're to be Christ-like and Christ loved all unconditionally, then to what extent must we accept our coworkers, friends, and even family who clearly live sinful lifestyles? How far are we supposed to go for such people close in proximity and relation to us? Are we veiling much "acceptance" under the cover that they're family or old friends, even when their choices are not Christ-like? So, we seek to answer this question: Is there such a thing as unconditional love, where no matter what one does, they receive the same love from God regardless? Secondly, by extension of Jesus' commandment to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34), do we unconditionally love and accept all actions and lifestyles of those around us?

First, we must look at how God's love works to know how to love one another. To preface what we'll find, the short answer is that there are two "layers" to God's love. This isn't an examination of *agapao* vs. *phileo* love, but rather this is to understand what the outcomes and our resulting actions are to be as an outgrowth of our Christ-like love towards those around us. God does have unconditional love for mankind that is extended to all, and as "unconditional" implies, has no conditions that need to be met to receive this love. God also has conditional love for us, where His love's gifts are extended dependent upon certain conditions being met. As we consider these layers of God's love, we must focus on what outcomes result from the love put forth.

We see God's unconditional love exemplified in one of the Bible's most cited passages, 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 outcome of this love is opportunity; God's love and grace provided everyone an opportunity for salvation. It cannot be argued that it takes great love to send His only Son, living a sinless life, as a sacrifice for **our** sins. God has a desired good for all people and that they take this opportunity He has provided:

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

Jesus indeed commands us in the Sermon on the Mount to have a love for fellow mankind not requiring any other qualifications be met:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Mat. 5:43-45)

Jesus does not tell us that because we're to love our enemy it means all actions by our enemies are thus acceptable. The key lies again in understanding what the desired outcome of this love is. Here, the outcome of such love is similar to the one exemplified in John 3:16. We desire good for all people which is achieved through a non-retaliatory demeanor where the goal of such love is for improved relations.

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Thus, we pray for such people who curse us, hate us, and persecute us. These people are deserving of such love, but that does not extend to actions of love whereby we show them as acceptable and condone all of their actions without questions. Instead, Jesus shows us many actions stemming from love are conditional.

Conditional statements are typically clear to see. We see Jesus outline these conditional “if-then” statements as it relates to the second layer of love in John 14, where “if” is the cause and “then” is the effect:

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. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. (John 14:21-24)

This love from God referred to in John 14 comes only after at least one condition is met; if we love Jesus, then we shall be loved of God. This love is beyond the general love or desire for us to choose Him (or, as referred to earlier, the first layer of God’s love). This is further made evident when we finish the passage we began in 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. 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. And this is the condemnation,

that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:16-21)

God provided an opportunity for all out of unconditional love for mankind. Without fulfilling any requirement, everyone can receive the outcome of this love: opportunity. However, those who fail to meet some conditions will not receive the outcome provided by that opportunity: salvation. Notably, if you do not believe, if you love darkness, and if you do evil deeds, you will not receive this gift. So, God's unconditional love grants us access to the rewards of His conditional love. In summary, the outcome of God's unconditional love is good for mankind. The outcome of God's conditional love is action towards us dependent upon our actions towards Him.

Such layers to God's love are shown throughout the Bible, and we can see a prime example in the Israelites' Egyptian bondage and escape. The Israelites were unconditionally God's people because they were descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them. (Exo 2:24-25)

However, were all of the Israelites able to unconditionally leave Egypt? No, although all had the opportunity, only those who followed God's directions and met the requisite conditions were able to leave Egypt with their family intact (The Passover in Exodus 12).

As it relates to how we are to extend love to those around us, Paul specifies that how we interact with others is to be conditional. In 1st Corinthians 5, Paul indicates we aren't to simply

accept and condone all sinful behavior and/or sinful persons around us unconditionally:

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (1 Cor. 5:9-11)

Paul has noted the exact situation we still find ourselves in today. We can't escape the world, so we will be in contact with people who choose to be sinful. However, those who would call themselves a fellow Christian, a brother or sister, but choose to actively sin do not get our hospitality. The love we extend is the same God has extended to us: we want better for them.

We would hope that all friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, etc. would believe, repent, and obey. This desire is unconditional love. These people are created by God; they are worth saving. Those whose behavior is sinful, however, do not blindly get our acceptance. That's not to say they get outright mistreatment from us - we still have the unconditional love for them to improve. However, there are limits to the acceptance and hospitality we extend. This is conditional love.

We have those close to us who clearly lead immoral and sinful lives made evident by sinful actions and behaviors. How do we handle these people? Unfortunately, I fear we find ourselves treating them with the same acceptance and hospitality as we do those who are (to our knowledge) making Godly choices and actions. We cover it with excuses of "They're family," "We go way back," "I've worked with them for years," or "It would be awkward if I excluded them." At some point, we have to ask ourselves if we're allowing human tradition to supersede the conditions which should be met before extending these actions

of our love. We cannot simultaneously say, “I disapprove of this choice you’ve made,” yet take actions that reflect down-right aid and approval. We have to draw a line at some point, because for such people we’re often the first and only message or example of a Godly lifestyle. The love God has extended to us, unconditional and conditional, is the same we must extend towards sin in people close to us: You have my unconditional love in that I want better for your soul, but you do not get the actions and benefits of my love while you actively choose this sin.

BEN

FROM THE SCRIPTURES: ABOUT EDIFICATION

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. (Rom. 14:19)

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. (Rom. 15:1-2)

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. (1 Cor. 14:26)

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. (Eph. 4:29)

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
August 23 - 25	Mount Carmel Road Gay, GA	Allan Daniel (Woodland, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Abram was rich in gold, silver and what else?
2. In prison, for whom did Joseph interpret dreams?
3. How long did Jonah say it would be before Nineveh was to be overthrown?
4. Which bird does Jesus say we have more value than?
5. Demetrius of Ephesus was a...?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. Which judge was betrayed to the Philistines by a woman?
SAMSON (Jdg. 16:5-6)
2. What is the first line (phrase) of Psalm 1?
BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO WALKS NOT IN THE
COUNSEL OF THE UNGODLY (Psa. 1:1)
3. Who did Amnon love, and then hate even more than he
had loved her? TAMAR (2 Sam. 13:15-19)
4. What did the shepherds do after they had visited the new-
born Jesus? SPREAD THE NEWS ABOUT JESUS'
BIRTH (Luke 2:15-17)
5. What came out of the fire Paul made on Malta and at-
tacked him? VIPER (Acts 28:3)

**IF YOU ARE HEADED
IN THE WRONG DIRECTION
GOD ALLOWS U-TURNS**