

Is God's Love Unconditional?

One of the great truths of the Bible, in perhaps its best-known verse is that: *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

The thought is echoed by the apostle Peter when he says that *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).*

But does that mean that God loves everyone regardless of anything and that He means to save everybody who has ever lived? Or has God made His love conditional upon some response?

Careful Reading

False ideas often come about because the Bible is read in an incorrect way. Take the wrong idea that Lucifer is a fallen angel, also known as Satan, or the devil. There is only one verse in the Bible where the name “Lucifer” is found, and then only in the King James (and the New King James) Version. Here it is:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12).

Read the Bible correctly and you will see that this verse is directed at the king of Babylon (v4), and in (verse 12) he is being likened to the Day Star (a translation many modern versions adopt) – that is, the planet Venus. It is important to read the Bible properly, otherwise we get all sorts of wrong ideas and end up picking and choosing the verses we take notice of.

God's Conditions

So, does God love us unconditionally, or are there conditions before we come within the ambit of His love? Look at God's dealings with the nation of Israel: people he had rescued to be His own special nation. When He brought them to Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments, this is what He said:

*I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, **to those who love Me and keep My commandments** (Exodus 20:5–6).*

And when He offered them blessing after blessing, this was the condition He specified:

***If** you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, **then** I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit... (Leviticus 26:3–4).*

That seems perfectly clear. God wanted His people to obey His commandments as a prior condition. He would *not* bless them if they disobeyed Him and went against His laws by worshipping Idols and living immoral lives.

Naaman and Elisha

In 2 Kings chapter 5, there is the account of the healing of Naaman, who was a commander of the army of the king of Syria but who was a leper. He came to Israel seeking a cure for his debilitating condition and had been told that he could be cured if he went to see the prophet Elisha. Arriving

there, Elisha sent a messenger who told him to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times and he would be cured. At first, Naaman refused, but then relented, and when he had done so: *“his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean”* (2 Kings 5:14).

Get the point? There was a life-changing blessing awaiting Naaman, but it only arrived when he obeyed. If he had gone off in a rage, or had chosen to ignore the message from God, he would have died a leper. Obedience to God’s commands brought health and healing.

What Jesus Said

The Lord Jesus had important things to say about people who failed to obey his commandments:

- ❖ *Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?* (Luke 6:46);
- ❖ *If you love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:15);
- ❖ *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him* (John 14:23).

These words are quite plain, Jesus wants us to obey his word. That means that we should follow him and obey what he taught and not rely upon man-made versions of Christianity. Much of what now passes as Christianity is based upon the traditions of men and Jesus had strong words to say for those who were: *“laying aside the commandment of God”* and, instead, *“hold the tradition of men”* (Mark 7:8).

It is the Word of God which is inspired and we need to read it for our-

selves to understand just what God has revealed about His will and purpose (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

Seeking for Truth

Jesus was God’s Son and was born on earth so that we can be saved from sin and death. He came to tell us what we are to do if we are to be found within the circle of God’s love and thus find salvation. His parting words to the disciples included the command that they should tell everybody about God’s offer of salvation:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

This was a message from the Father for, as Jesus explained:

I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent me gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told me, so I speak (John 12:49–50).

If you accept that the Bible is the inspired (God-breathed) Word of God and give it the respect it deserves, then it is important to read the Scriptures properly and reverently in order to find out the truth it contains and what God requires of His faithful followers.

- ❖ *God does not love us unconditionally,*
- ❖ *He loves us if we keep His commandments,*
- ❖ *So it really does matter what we believe and how we live.*

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