

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

John 3:14-21

INTRO: We are continuing the subject of unconditional love. One of our folk gave me to read two books by Dr. ES Williams. The first is called, "The Dark Side of Christian Counseling" and the other, "Christ or Therapy?" We will be getting both for the library. On the two subjects of unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness, this second book is the very best of anything I have read. Let me quote to you from the book, "Christ or Therapy?" He writes, "It is helpful to know that attaching the word 'unconditional' to God's love is a relatively recent phenomenon. Over the last few decades it has silently slipped into the evangelical vocabulary and gained a solid foothold in Christian thinking. Such is the acceptance of unconditional love that it is now regarded by many as part of orthodox Christian doctrine" (pg. 63).

Now, I mentioned last time that ES Williams traces the history of the phrase, 'unconditional love' to Erik Fromm. That was probably in the 1970's. He says that Erik Fromm was the first to use the phrase 'unconditional love' (Christ or Therapy, 65). He was a psychologist. I expect that the teaching of love in the Church prepared the way for this view. So it may have gone from the preaching in the church to the psychologist to the NAM. If so, the roots go back, to DL Moody and the preaching of the 'boy preacher'. If that is correct, I have no doubt at all that they had absolutely no intention of such a development. Nevertheless, today if one takes exception with that phrase, one's spirituality is in doubt by many Christians.

In our last message we defined the meaning of the phrase, 'unconditional love'; we talked about how we came to such a view and then we defined the word 'love' itself. This morning we want to answer these questions: Is God's love unconditional? What is the relationship of love to justice? And last, what are the results of teaching unconditional love?

IV. IS GOD'S LOVE UNCONDITIONAL?

So, let us begin by considering if God's love is truly unconditional. I do think there is a sense in which we can say that when God sent His Son into the world to die for sinners, there was a sense in which

His love was unconditional. Let me explain. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God loved us while we were yet sinners. He loved us without our first having to be worthy of that love. He loved us while we were still in our sin. He gave His Son for us, that is, He loved us before we met any conditions. In verse 9 Paul says we were reconciled to God when we were still enemies. God's love in His Son towards us was unconditional in that sense.

But now we ask, if man does not respond to that love, does God just go on loving man unconditionally? When man spurns the love of God and turns His back on Him, does God go right on loving them? Well, let me ask, in the time of the flood, after Noah had preached for 120 years and man persisted in sin, did God go right on loving man? Well, God had warned man in Genesis 6:3. He said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever..." And when man failed to respond to God's love, He sent a flood and drowned them all. I ask you, did God still love them when they were drowning? Does He love them now that they are in hell? Go to Genesis 7 (read 17-23). You see, love has expectations, and when those expectations are spurned long enough, justice kicks in and takes its course. And justice is not based on love, it is based on facts or truth.

So, I ask, when God loved man, and sent His only begotten Son to die for mankind, did He expect nothing back? I want you to notice a few things from John 3:16. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Now I ask, did God expect nothing in return? Clearly from John 3:16 God expects man to believe. From other passages it becomes abundantly clear that God expects man to repent when he learns of his sinfulness. Before man ever got saved God loved him. He loved him unconditionally in this sense only: Man did not have to perform anything good before God sent His Son. But if man refuses to believe Him, is God's love still unconditional and are there no consequences for disobedience? What is the implication when it says if man believes he will not perish? That tells us that

if he does not meet the condition of believing, he will perish in hell. And who is it that casts such unbelievers into hell? And does God still love those whom He sends to hell? And if He does, love has just become absolutely meaningless.

Listen to Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" I ask you, does God still love them when He says that?

Go with me to Matthew 21 (read 33-41). Here we have a vinedresser who has lent out his vineyard to vinedressers. Now when vintage time was near the owner sent his servants that they might receive its fruit. You see, the landowner expected something back. But the vinedressers killed the servants each time when they came. Now the parable pictures God in the OT, and that He expected fruit back from His people. God does expect something from His own. He loved Israel and treated them well, and expected some returns.

Well, after the landowner had sent one servant after another, at long last he sent his son. So look at verse 37 (read). Here is the picture of God loving the world. And notice that this landowner expected something in return. He said, "They will respect my son." And if they respected his son, then they would give him the land rent. But instead they killed his son. Now here is a picture of God sending His own Son to save the world, and He expected something in return. But instead, they killed His Son.

Now I ask you, those to whom God reveals Himself as He did in this parable, does He go on unconditionally loving them when they spurn His love? Well, in verse 40 Jesus asks these people who are steeped in religion and have had every opportunity to give God returns for what He has given to them, what the landowner will do? So look at verse 40 (read). The answer was so obvious that even these ungodly religious people could correctly answer. So look at their answer in verse 41 (read). So, I ask you, is

there some point at which God no longer loves people? If He miserably destroys them, does He still love them? And when they are in hell, does He still love them?

When Sodom and Gomorrah reached a certain level of sinfulness, I ask you, did God still love them? Go to Genesis 19:24-25 (read). Let me ask you, did God still love Sodom and Gomorrah when He poured out His wrath on them? No! You see, justice took over. God loved us unconditionally when He sent His only begotten Son to die for us, but if we fail to respond to that love, justice takes over. When justice takes over, God is still love, but His love for those people has run out.

When someone blasphemes the Holy Spirit, does God still love them? Does He still seek their good? No! They can never be forgiven! Go with me to the book of Revelation chapter 6 (read 12-17). Again I ask you, did God still love these people while and after He poured out His wrath on them? And when they are in hell, does He still love them?

Those are a few brief passages that indicate to us that God's love is not unconditional forever. We could multiply such passages. Sooner or later, if man rejects God and lives in sin, justice takes over.

Recently I heard David Hocking speak. My wife and I had heard him some 25 years ago, and by now he is an old man. He dismissed unconditional love as though it was not even to be considered.

In a message on May 5, of 2012 Charles Price, pastor of the People's Church in Toronto said, "I hear that God's love is unconditional. I do not find that in Scripture. I find that His judgment is conditional. Praise God. I find that His discipline is conditional and I find that His love is conditional. God is love. That never changes. But being recipients of His love is conditional. If you will be beneficiaries of that love you have to keep His commandments. If we disobey Him, we will not be recipients of His love" end quote. You see, no matter how man behaves, God remains love, He remains faithful, He remains just, He remains all He ever was. But depending on how man

behaves, God's attributes will be manifested accordingly. His love may give way to justice, when He is rejected and spurned long enough.

David Cloud says that the two fundamental principles of modern psychology are self-esteem and unconditional love. Let me read for you what he says about unconditional love in a rather lengthy quote. He speaks here from the point of view of those who believe that love is unconditional:

The doctrine of self-esteem is intimately associated with that of unconditional love. To have the highest self-esteem we must know that we are loved unconditionally, no strings attached.

*We must see God as a merciful Father who "accepts us totally, exactly as we are" (Chris Leger and Wendy Bray, *Insight into Self-Esteem*, 2006, p. 12).*

As Larry Crabb says, "I am completely acceptable to him regardless of my behavior" (Effective Biblical Counseling, 1977, p. 70).

Like the doctrine of self-esteem, unconditional love is promoted both by secular counselors and Christian. It is taught by Rick Warren, James Dobson, Philip Yancy, Joyce Meyer, Larry Crabb, Gary Smalley, Selwyn Hughes, David Seamands, Gary Chapman, Charles Stanley, and a host of other popular Christian leaders and authors.

*James Dobson said that his book *Love for a Lifetime* is designed to "sum up the importance of selfless, unconditional love" ("Loving Focus: Dr. James and Shirley Dobson," *Christianitytoday.com*, Sept. 12, 2008).*

Dr. E.S. Williams observes: "While self-esteem attempts to make man feel good about his sin, unconditional love attempts to make sinful man feel that he will not face judgment or punishment" (Christ or Therapy? p. 71).

Like the doctrine of self-esteem, the doctrine of unconditional love was developed by the fathers of the psychological counseling movement and New Agers.

Erik Fromm was the first to use the phrase "unconditional love," while Carl Rogers coined the term "unconditional positive regard," by which "he meant the granting of love and approval regardless of an individual's behaviour" (E.S. Williams, *Christ or Therapy?* pp. 65, 66).

The doctrine of unconditional love is a major theme of New Age thought. The god of unconditional love puts no obligations on people and does not punish sin. Harold Becker says the human race is "becoming consciously aware of unconditional love" (*Unconditional Love--An Unlimited Way of Being*, 1907, p. 7). It is "an energy and power" that is "transforming the course of all humanity." Roy Klienwachter says, "Unconditional love means unconditional freedom. ... Retribution is a lie, it was all made. ... Anyone who tells you different, is not coming from unconditional love" (*Unconditional Love*, 2008).

Unconditional love is a theme of the occult. Consider Aleister Crowley, who has had a massive influence on the rock & roll culture and whose photo appeared on the cover of the Beatles' *Sargent Pepper's* album. His system was based on two principles: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" and "Love is the law, love under will." Crowley's "love" was unconditional love with no obligations. The *Voice of Lucifer* website proclaims that "unconditional love is an unlimited way of being" and "as a way of changing our world for the better" and "the sole vehicle for our salvation."

Unconditional love is a theme of the "Christian" homosexual movement. God accepts them as they are.

Unconditional love is also a fundamental principle of the emerging church.

In *An Emerging Church Primer* Justin Taylor says we must proclaim "God's message of unconditional love."

The God of unconditional love is not the God of Scripture. The love of the sovereign Creator God is unfathomable and unmerited, but not unconditional. God's love is demonstrated in Christ and the Cross

and to benefit from God's love one must repent and receive Christ as Lord and Saviour" end quote.

He writes further, "The god of self-esteem and unconditional love is not the God of Scripture; he is the god of end-times apostasy. As Dr. E.S. Williams observes:" And here is what Dr. E.S. Williams said, "The concept of unconditional love only exists in a mythological world in which there is no sin, no evil and no law, in which people are free to live as they like without fear of judgment and punishment. In the real world, unconditional love is no more and no less than licentiousness -- an attitude that denies the accepted rules and morals that govern human behaviour. It is an attitude that allows us to do what we want without sanction or control. It is the essential message of pagan morality and New Age salvation" (*Christ or Therapy?* p. 69).

Cloud goes on, "The permissive god of 'Christian' self-esteem dogma longs to satisfy the needs and desires of the human heart. He (that is this permissive god) delights in meeting our needs and likes to make us feel good about ourselves, no matter what. He is careful not to set standards too high or too difficult for us to meet. He is satisfied with our behavior so long as we do our best. He is a god who is 'mighty to save' mankind from a lifetime cycle of low self-esteem. And if the truth were known, he does not really hate evil and sin all that much, for he accepts us totally, exactly as we are. He has commanded us to love ourselves and he loves everybody unconditionally no matter how they behave." He is quoting here from a book called, "The Dark Side Of Christian Counseling" (Williams, *The Dark Side of Christian Counselling*, p. 141).

Is God's love unconditional? Does He have no expectations? My conclusion is a resound, "No!"

V. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE TO JUSTICE?

So, let us go to our second question: What is the relationship of love to justice? We have already discussed what love is. Let me go over that once more briefly. In human relationships agappe love is the attraction or attachment of one person to another or others. But it is not based on emotions. It is

grounded in a conviction or knowledge of truth which causes one to act on behalf of the welfare of another person. It does not have to do with feelings. So, agaptee love can be commanded because it is based on truth or facts, not on ever changing emotions. This love is reasoned love. It will do right even when one doesn't feel like it. Love will do what is right for the good of other people when it is legitimate to do it.

Justice will do what is right with regard to others when they have merited that which is painful. The relationship between love and justice is righteousness. The difference is that love will do good for those who have a legitimate need for it. Justice will do that which is painful for others when righteousness requires it.

With regard to love, I gave you the example of the young man who was trapped under his car. With regard to justice, let me give you another example. Some kids in town have been vandalizing and stealing from businesses. They have been reported, but they cannot be caught. And then, in some innocent way, you find out who these boys are. Let me ask you, what is to kick in, love or justice? And now, since you have come to know this information, if you do not do something, you are an accomplice to the next stealing. Justice now requires that you inform the right people about this.

Now, God is both love and He is just. When sin has taken place, any sin; His justice requires that what is right must be done. We all know that hell is justice for anyone who commits one sin. I need to say much more here but I cannot for the sake of time. Let me just say that when man does certain things for too long, God's mercy and His love must give way to justice and His justice must insist that whatever is right must be done, even if that means casting the person into hell. You have to be blind not to see that when you read Scripture. One example; the flood and destruction of most of mankind.

Let me quote here from my messages on the doctrine of God: "Now here is what we must get right, and you may not like me for saying this. When man has spurned the love of God, or others have failed to bring him the message of the love of God, and God's justice demands that He condemn to eternal hell that person, His justice says, 'He is wicked. He must go to hell.' And His love agrees and says, 'He is wicked. He must go

to hell.' And His mercy says, 'He is wicked. He must go to hell.' And His goodness says, 'He is wicked. He must go to hell.' There is no division in God between His love and mercy and justice. They all agree and cry out, "Let him die!"

Listen to that great writer of the past, Oswald Chambers. He says, "If your concept of love does not agree with justice, judgment, purity, and holiness, then your idea of love is wrong. It is not love you conceive of in your mind, but some vague infinite foolishness, all tears and softness and of infinite weakness", (The Love of God: An intimate look at the Father Heart of God, 12).

ES Williams writes, "Klienwachter explains that unconditional means that there are no conditions to God's love. If there was a condition to God's love, then God would be giving conditional love. And freedom is given from unconditional love. Because love, freedom and choice are unconditional, there can be no punishment." Then he says that Klienwachter emphasizes the following point when he says: "Here is where the so called enlightened fall by the wayside. They cannot accept any of these things without the recourse of punishment. You can practice unconditional love, unconditional freedom and unconditional choice without punishments! God will never punish you! Retribution is a lie, it is all made up. Only man will punish you. Anyone who tells you different, is not coming from unconditional love. They live in fear of you practicing these things. They do not understand what unconditional means" (67).

I mentioned this quote by Dr. E.S. Williams earlier but it is worth repeating here: "While self-esteem attempts to make man feel good about his sin, unconditional love attempts to make sinful man feel that he will not face judgment or punishment" (Christ or Therapy? p. 71).

VI. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF TEACHING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE?

A. In The World

Well, let us briefly consider the results of teaching unconditional love. Let us begin with its results in

the world. You might ask, "Is this a big teaching in the world?" It is simply amazing then to read ES Williams and to find that the emergent church, the NAM, Buddhism, the Occult and others in the world believe in unconditional love (ES Williams, 66-69).

ES Williams writes, "Harold W. Becker, a New Age devotee, has dedicated his life to promoting the concept of unconditional love. His book 'Unconditional Love - An Unlimited Way of Being' (2007) explains that one by one people around the world are awakening to an energy and power that is transforming the course of all humanity. 'An inner impulse is driving us forward and asking us to evolve beyond our current reality. This silent force promises to change forever the way we live on this planet. We as a race of people, are becoming consciously aware of unconditional love..." (pg. 66).

What is the one big problem of teaching unconditional love in the world? They now have no need for Christ! They have no need for salvation! Sin has become irrelevant! You can be taught how to feel good about yourself without dealing with sin, and when you do that, in Jesus' words one has been made twofold more the child of hell.

B. In The Church

What about in the Church? What are the results? I have given this series the name, "The Subtle Undoing Of The Fear Of The Lord." It is my view that this teaching of unconditional love has downplayed the seriousness of sin in the Church and thus has had its part in reducing the fear of God in the Church. This in turn, has caused the Church to lose its drawing power on the world. They now have nothing different to turn to in the church than they have in the world.

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Williams says that unconditional love is a concept shared by the NAM, Buddhists, Luciferians, and others. Then he says, "We have seen that unconditional love is closely related to the idea of self esteem. While self-esteem attempts to make man feel good about his sin, unconditional love attempts to make sinful man feel that he will not face judgment or punishment. Both are counterfeits, for they deny that we live in a fallen world controlled by sin and evil. The basic premise of unconditional love is that we live in a lawless world. Therefore we are free to live as we like, to do what we want, and we will not be judged, condemned or punished. No matter how we behave, we are acceptable to the god of unconditional love" (71-72).

Unconditional love is a foundational principle of almost all modern Christian counseling. Larry Crabb was one of the writers instrumental in bringing this about. ES Williams whom I just quoted writes, "In 'Effective Biblical Counseling' Larry Crabb stresses the importance of unconditional love." Williams then quotes Crabb thus: "My need for security demands that I be unconditionally loved, accepted and cared for, now and forever. God has seen me at my worst and still loves me to the point of giving his life for me. That kind of love can never lose. I am completely acceptable to him (small h) regardless of my behavior" (pg. 63).

Selwyn Hughes, of the Christian counseling movement says, "What we need, says Hughes, is a sense that God loves us unconditionally so that we feel better about ourselves, so that we feel secure and significant and

have a healthy self-esteem. However, this psychological view of the Fall ignores the holiness of God and fails to acknowledge the sinfulness of mankind. What Hughes portrays is a permissive God who makes us feel good about ourselves, no matter what. Scripture, however, describes the Fall not as a psychological disaster but as man's rebellion against his Creator. Mankind does not have an identity crisis, but a sin problem" (Christ or Th pg 64).

The major problem of the unconditional love teaching in the world, as I see it, is that it makes the lost sinner feel good about himself without dealing with his sin. And the major problem of this teaching in the Church is that it takes the fear of God out of the Christian by minimizing sin.

CONCL: And so, let us conclude. If unconditional love is biblical, if it is godly, I ask, how does a God hating world love this doctrine so much? How does the NAM love it? How is it Buddhists love it? How is it that one gets 1,820,000 hits on the internet?

Is God's love unconditional? Well, when He loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die on our behalf, He did not do so before we met any conditions. Before we were born, He sent Him. But when we learn of His love and spurn it, or we fail to bring it to others, eventually people die in sin and God sends them to hell. His love has come to an end and His justice has entered.

What then is the relationship between love and justice? Love is based on facts or truth and does whatever it can for the well-being of another. Justice too is based on truth, and will mete out judgment whenever a person deserves it. It will do what is right with regard to others when they have merited that which is painful. The relationship between love and justice is righteousness. The difference is that love will do good for those who have a legitimate need for it. Justice will do that which is painful for others when righteousness requires it.

And finally, what are the results of teaching unconditional love? Well, in the world, people can be trained out of needing a Savior. Sin is vanquished by unconditional love. Sin has no consequences. And in the Church? What are the results of this teaching? Sin is minimized and the fear of God is lost.