

Christian Clichés That Contradict Christ

by David Servant

God's love is not unconditional, but rather conditional, and He loves some people with an approving love and others with a merciful love.

Scripture: Psalm 103:13, John 14:21, John 15:9, John 16:27, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Gods Love", "Christian Obedience"

Description

David Servant delves into the misconceptions surrounding God's love, debunking common Christian clichés about unconditional love and emphasizing the conditional nature of God's love as revealed in Scripture. Through examining passages like John 15:9-10, he highlights the importance of obedience in abiding in Jesus' love, showcasing the distinction between merciful love and approving love. Servant emphasizes that God's love is not the same for everyone, varying between sinners and saints, and stresses the significance of earning Jesus' approving love through repentance and obedience.

Transcript

It has been said that if you repeat something often enough, people will start to believe it even if it isn't true. This certainly seems to be true concerning many oft-repeated Christian clichés about God's love. Consider the following statements that so frequently reverberate within our Christian circles:

- 1.) God loves everyone unconditionally.
- 2.) God loves everyone the same.
- 3.) There isn't anything you can do to earn or deserve Jesus' love.
- 4.) Jesus' love for us is not based on our performance.
- 5.) There is nothing you can do that would make Jesus stop loving you.
- 6.) There is nothing you can do to make Jesus love you more or less than He does right now.

We've all heard these, but are these true according to Scripture? Consider the following words of Christ, spoken to His very own disciples:

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (John

15:9-10, emphasis added).

Notice the conditional word if in the declaration, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." Jesus' disciples are responsible to abide in His love, just as He said, and they do that by keeping His commandments. Only those who keep Jesus' commandments abide in His love. If we don't keep His commandments, we don't abide in His love. That means Jesus' love for us is conditional, and there is no getting around that fact. (Other scriptures besides this one, which we will consider shortly, make the same point.) So the first cliché under consideration--that God loves everyone unconditionally--is false according to Christ. Incidentally, the Greek word translated love in these two verses of John's Gospel is *agape*, which is often defined as "unconditional love," a definition that is obviously not correct according to these verses.

But doesn't Scripture declare that God loves those who don't keep His commandments? What about John 3:16: "For God so loved the world..."? That must mean that God also loves sinners, which must mean that His love for them is not conditioned upon their obedience. How then are we to reconcile these two apparent contradictory facts of God's love being conditional and also unconditional?

It seems to me that the only way to reconcile them is to simply acknowledge what we all know to be true from experience--that not all love is the same. Some love is conditional, while other love is not conditional. Non-conditional love is known as mercy, and could be called "merciful love" or "merciful favor." (When someone loves you, he bestows his favor on you, and you experience some benefit because of that favor.) In this article, I will refer to unconditional love as merciful love. It is a love that says, "I love you in spite of." It loves undeserving people. It is the kind of love God has for those who are not submitted to Him, the unregenerate. His merciful love for them is temporary, however, lasting only until they die. God forestalls His judgment upon them all of their lives as He gives them years to repent. Jesus gave His life for them, providing a way for them to be forgiven. To that degree and in that way, it can be said that God loves them.

But there is also such a thing as conditional love. It is known as approval, and it could be called "approving favor" or "approving love" as I will refer to it in this article. It is a love that is earned or merited. It is a love that says, "I love you because you deserve my favor."

God of course never loves those who are not submitted to Him with an approving love. Or it could be said this way: God never has a love for them like a father has for his child. Rather, Scripture declares, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:13, emphasis added). God has fatherly compassion only on those who fear Him (which implies that they therefore obey Him). God does not have the same compassion on those who don't fear Him. His love for sinners is more akin to the mercy a judge has on a convicted killer who receives a life sentence rather than the death penalty.

In light of these truths, clearly God does not love everyone the same, which means that cliché #2 is also not true.

Unfortunately, many of us mistakenly think that if love is conditional it is not love at all. Or we even belittle such a love, saying it is purely selfish, and contrary to God's love.

The truth is, however, that God does indeed possess conditional love, as we have just read from the lips of Jesus in John 15:9-10: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." Thus approving love

should not be sneered at. Approving love is the primary love that God has for His true children.

Stop and ask yourself this question: "Which kind of love would I rather people have for me--merciful love or approving love?" I'm sure you would prefer that people love you "because of" not "in spite of."

For example, would you rather hear your spouse say, "I have absolutely no reason to love you, and there is nothing about you that motivates me to show you my favor" or, "I love you for so many reasons, because there is so much about you that I admire"? We all, of course, would prefer that our spouses love us with an approving love, and that is the primary kind of love that draws couples together and keeps them together. When there is nothing that a person admires in his or her spouse, when all approving love has ceased to exist, few marriages last. If they do endure, the credit goes to merciful love, which stems from the godly character of the giver of that love.

All this being so, we see that approving, or conditional love, is not an inferior love at all. While merciful love is the most praiseworthy love to give, approving love is the most praiseworthy love to gain. We should desire God's approving love much more than His merciful love. Moreover, the fact that approving love is the only kind of love that the Father has ever had for Jesus elevates it to its rightful place of respect. God the Father has never possessed even a drop of merciful love for Jesus, because there was never anything unlovely in Christ. Jesus testified:

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again (John 10:17, emphasis added).

Notice the phrase "for this reason" and the word "because." Both indicate that there is a condition. The Father loved Jesus because of His obedience to suffer death. So there must be nothing wrong and everything right about approving love. Jesus earned and deserved His Father's favor. (Incidentally, the Greek word translated love in this verse is also agape, proving again that agape should not be defined as "unconditional love.")

Looking again at John 15:9-10, we note that Jesus said that he abided in His Father's love by keeping His Father's commandments:

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (John 15:9-10, emphasis added).

So there is another scripture that reveals the Father's approving love of Jesus. Moreover, as I have already pointed out, this same scripture indicates that we are to follow Jesus' example and abide in His love by keeping His commandments. Jesus was clearly speaking of approving love in this passage, telling us that we can and should earn His love, and that we may take ourselves out of His love through disobedience to His commandments. We abide in His love only if we keep His commandments. Again, this is completely contrary to what we so often hear, but we just read it straight from the lips of Jesus. And this exposes the fallacies of clichés number 3, 4, 5 and 6. According to Jesus, we (#3) can earn or deserve His love, (#4) His love is based on our performance, (#5) there is something we could do to make Jesus stop loving us, and (#6) there is something we can do to make Jesus love us more or less.

Of course, God still reserves plenty of merciful love for His children. When we sin, He mercifully delays His discipline. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to mercifully forgive us and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Yet the fact remains that Jesus only affirmed God's approving love for those who keep His commandments. Here are two other scriptures besides what we read in John 15:9-10 which make that same point:

For the Father Himself loves you [and why does He love you?], because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father (John 16:27, emphasis added).

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me [that is, he who meets that condition] will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him....If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and [because of that] My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him (John 14:21, 23, emphasis added).

Note that in the second quotation, Jesus was not making a promise to uncommitted believers that if they started keeping His word, He would draw closer to them in a special way. No, Jesus was promising that if anyone would start loving Him and keeping His word, then--once those conditions were met--His Father would love that person, and both He and His Father would come to live in that person, a clear reference to being born again. Everyone who is born again has both the Father and Son living in him by the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:9). So we see, as Scripture so often affirms, that those who are truly born again are those who have repented and have begun to obey Jesus, and they are the only ones who thus gain the approving love of the Father. God favors such people in a special way--He comes to live in them. He doesn't do that for those whom He favors with only a merciful love.

The Conclusion

Let's revisit those six clichés again:

- 1.) God loves everyone unconditionally. Not true. God's approving love is certainly conditional. And even His merciful love is conditioned upon a person being physically alive. After death, God's merciful love ends, so it must be conditional, being temporary.
- 2.) God loves everyone the same. Not true. God doesn't love anyone the same, because all, sinners and saints alike, He disapproves or approves to varying degrees. And certainly it is true that God's love is not the same for His children and the devil's children. God loves His children much more than those who are not born again. He primarily loves them with an approving love because they have repented and are striving to obey His commandments. As they grow in holiness, He has less and less reason to love them with a merciful love, and more and more reason to love them with an approving love, which is exactly what they desire.
- 3.) There isn't anything you can do to earn or deserve Jesus' love. Not true. Anyone can and everyone should earn Jesus' approving love by their repentance and obedience. It is true, however, that no one can earn His merciful love, as it is unconditional.
- 4.) Jesus' love for us is not based on our performance. Not true. God's merciful love is not based upon our performance, but God's approving love certainly is.
- 5.) There is nothing you could do that would make Jesus stop loving you. Not true. A Christian could forfeit Jesus' approving love by returning to the practice of sin to live like an unbeliever, putting himself in a position to experience only Jesus' merciful love. And, similarly, the non-believer could die, and that would end Jesus' merciful love for him, the only love Jesus ever had for him.

6.) There is nothing you could do to make Jesus love you more or less than He does right now. Not true. There is something believers can do that can make Jesus approvingly love them more: they can be more obedient. And there is something they can do to make Jesus approvingly love them less: become disobedient. For those who are not children of God, there is something that they can do that would make God love them much more: repent. Then they would gain God's approving love for the first time. And there is something they can do that would make God love them less: die. Again, they would then forfeit the only love Jesus ever had for them, His merciful love.

I hope you can see that these common clichés are not only wrong, but are also very damaging to the cause of Christ, because unbelievers who hear them are deceived into thinking that they don't need to repent, and professing believers are deceived into thinking that holiness is not very important, whereas Jesus warned that only those who do His Father's will shall enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 7:21).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-servant/christian-clichés-that-contradict-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net