

God's Love/hate Relationship With the World

by David Servant

God's love and hate are not mutually exclusive, and preachers must emphasize His holy hatred for sinners in order to warn them of God's wrath and call them to repentance.

Scripture: Psalm 5:5, Psalm 7:11, Psalm 11:5, Jeremiah 12:7, Hosea 9:15, Matthew 25:31, Luke 24:47, Romans 5:6

Topics: "Gods Holiness", "Divine Wrath"

Description

David Servant challenges the common Christian cliché 'God loves the sinner but hates the sin,' pointing out that Scripture reveals God's hatred towards sinners as well. He emphasizes that God's love and hatred are not contradictory but complementary aspects of His character, with His mercy restraining His wrath. Servant highlights the importance of preaching the truth about God's holiness and wrath, as seen in the examples of Jonathan Edwards and John the Baptist, who warned of God's judgment without sugarcoating the message of repentance. He cautions against the modern trend of emphasizing God's love at the expense of His holiness, urging preachers to present the full counsel of God's Word.

Transcript

In last month's e-teaching, Christian Clichés that Contradict Christ, I questioned the truthfulness of six Christian clichés concerning God's "unconditional" love. There was one more cliché that I wanted to mention but didn't have enough space, the very common saying, "God loves the sinner but hates his sin."

This particular cliché is actually more biblically accurate than the six I listed last month, because it attempts to affirm God's love for sinners while at the same time upholding His holiness. Yet like the six clichés I listed last month, this one also falls short of the full truth, and it can thus be misleading to people and damaging to Christ's cause. Why do I say this? One reason is because Scripture not only teaches that God loves sinners, but also that He hates them. Surprised? Read for yourself:

The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit (Ps. 5:5-6, emphasis added).

The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates (Ps. 11:5, emphasis added).

I have forsaken My house, I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul [God's people Israel] into the hand of her enemies. My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; she

has roared against Me; therefore I have come to hate her (Jer. 12:7-8, emphasis added).

All their evil is at Gilgal; indeed, I came to hate them there! Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels (Hos. 9:15, emphasis added).

These verses of scripture are all in your Bible as well as mine! Your Bible declares that God hates "all who do iniquity" (Ps. 5:5). Since all unregenerate people "do iniquity," we can conclude that God hates them all. (Incidentally, this verse among many others leads us to believe that God's "free gift of righteousness" is more than just a legal standing of righteousness that results in no practical righteousness, otherwise God would hate His own children.)

But how can it be true that God both loves and hates sinners? The only way to reconcile this apparent contradiction is to once again recognize that not all love is the same. As I stated in last month's e-teaching, *Christian Clichés that Contradict Christ*, some love is conditional, what I referred to as "approving love," and some love is unconditional, what I referred to as "merciful love." From the standpoint of His merciful love, God loves sinners (see Eph. 2:4-6; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3, and look for the word mercy). But from the standpoint of his approving love, God utterly hates them--they are in fact abhorrent to Him. Can you imagine how you would feel if you had created a race of people who inwardly knew just how to please you yet who ignored and disobeyed you continually, even using your name as a curse word? Might you not be somewhat upset with them?

Note that all of the above-quoted scriptures do not say that God only hates what people do--they say He hates them. We cannot separate a person from what he does. What a person does reveals his character--who he is. Thus if God disapproves of sin He of course must disapprove of sinners. God is so pure that His disapproval is very strong, and the word hate describes it well. To separate the sin from the sinner by saying "God loves the sinner but hates the sin" is potentially misleading.

Other scriptures declare that certain people--not just what those people do--are an abomination to God. See, for example, Deut. 22:5, 16; Lev. 26:29-30; Ps. 5:5-6; Prov. 3:32, 11:20, 16:5, 17:15. Beyond that, there are many other expressions of God's hatred of certain people in Scripture. For example, when we read, "the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah" (2 Kin. 23:26), we don't get the impression that we are reading about God's love for sinners.

Regrettably, very little is said of God's hatred or abhorrence of sinners among modern Christians. Most preachers, it seems, emphasize God's love for sinners, and their audiences consequently are often misled into thinking that God approves of them in spite of their sin, which couldn't be further from the truth. The truth is that God utterly hates them, but He is mercifully giving them time to repent and gain His approval before they die, and only in that sense does He love them. When they die His mercy ends, and they will then experience the fullness of His hatred. The people in hell do not think that God loves them. They all know that He utterly hates them. And the truth is that when they were alive He hated them just as thoroughly, but then He showed them mercy, or merciful love. If unrepentant people who are still alive knew how much God hates them, they would be astounded at His merciful love towards them.

This also indicates to us that God's holy hatred of sinners and His merciful love toward them are not contradictory aspects of His character. Rather, they perfectly blend together. God's mercy is magnified even more by His holy hatred, and vice versa. Preachers who want to emphasize God's true love for sinners must first emphasize His holy hatred for them.

If the history of revival teaches us anything, it teaches us that revival occurs when people are awakened, not to some false concept of a grandfather God who "loves everyone unconditionally," but when they realize their present precarious condition before a holy and wrathful God. For example, Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, whom God used as a instrument of revival during America's Great Awakening in the 1740s, certainly didn't mislead his congregation about their slippery state before God. In his classic sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, Edwards simply affirmed biblical truth about God's attitude toward the unrepentant:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment....O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder...

What a picture of God's anger and His mercy! Although Jonathan Edwards witnessed wonderful revival in his church and community, he was ultimately dismissed from his pastorate for holding to his biblical convictions. Only preachers who truly love their audiences and who aren't afraid of losing popularity and money can possibly preach such truth. Of course, Jesus was one of those kinds of preachers. Never once did He tell an unsaved audience that God loved them, and there is only one record of His telling one unregenerate individual one time about God's love for the world (and that is found in John 3:16). Rather, Jesus regularly warned sinners of God's wrath and called them to repentance (see, for example, Matt. 4:17; 5:22, 29-30, 8:11-12; 10:28; 11:20-23; 13:41-42, 49-50; 18:19; 22:13; 23:33; 24:50-51; 25:30). What Jesus told one person one time we have made our universal theme to the unsaved, and what He constantly emphasized to them we have kept a secret! Are we really being seeker-sensitive with our non-offensive evangelistic sermons, or are we actually ashamed of Jesus and His words? (See Luke 9:26.) Why are so many pastors afraid to tell the biblical truth even to professing Christians in the church? What does that reveal about those pastors? What does that reveal about their congregations?

John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man who ever lived (Matt. 11:11), never mentioned God's love when he preached the gospel (see Matt. 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-18). He sounded much like Jonathan Edwards, warning his audiences of God's coming wrath. Likewise, there is not a single case in the book of Acts where anyone preaching the gospel told an unsaved audience that God loved them. Rather, the biblical preachers warned their audiences that God did not approve of them, that they were in danger, and that they needed to make dramatic changes in their lives. Had they only told their audiences that God loved them and all they need to do was "accept Christ as Savior" (as do so many modern ministers), they may have misled them into thinking that God approved of them, that they were in no danger, were not storing up wrath for themselves, and had no need to repent. This is of vital importance, because salvation cannot occur without repentance. Jesus told His apostles to "preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47). We may be filling churches with evangelistic messages about God's love, but are we filling heaven?

God's love is greatly distorted when modern preachers, under the influence of pop psychology (whether they realize it or not) tell their unsaved audiences how Christ's death proves their value before God. "You were worth dying for" they say. Even the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price is perverted to show supposedly that Christ gave up everything to gain what was of inestimable value--us! (Wasn't God blessed to get YOU?) Paul, however, stood amazed, not at how the cross proved the alleged value of a race of rebels, but how it displayed God's amazing merciful love, because Jesus wasn't dying for good people, but for ungodly sinners(see Rom. 5:6-10). His death saved us, not from underestimating our true worth, but from God's righteous wrath that we all fully deserve(see Rom. 5:6-10). Apart from God's holy hatred of sinners, His love for them is essentially meaningless.

Why don't we follow the example of Jesus and John the Baptist, telling the unrepentant the truth found in Scripture?:

God is a righteous judge,

And a God who has indignation every day.

If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword;

He has bent His bow and made it ready (Psalm 7:11-12).

This is the biblical picture of God's love toward the unrepentant. His merciful love restrains Him from releasing the arrow that He has already drawn in His bow, the arrow that is tenuously aimed in righteous indignation at every sinner. This is a biblical example that would have fit right into Jonathan Edward's sermons, or John the Baptist's.

The unsaved inside and outside the church are under a huge delusion as they mistake God's mercy for His approval. They will be shocked at their judgment, just like the goats Jesus described in Matthew 25:31-46. They don't understand that God is very kind to His enemies, so they imagine that they are at peace with Him. What a tragedy it is when the church reinforces this delusion. I'm afraid that the bumper sticker that says, "Smile, God Loves You!" speaks volumes about modern theology and evangelistic preaching. Should we really be encouraging hell-bound rebels whom God utterly abhors, to smile?

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