

IS GOD'S LOVE UNCONDITIONAL?

Is God's love unconditional? Isn't that a great thought question? Of course God's love is unconditional. In just last week's message we reiterated what we already know—God loves everyone; He allowed Jesus to die for everyone.

At the height of His popularity, Jesus, in the hill country near Jerusalem, sits down to teach His disciples. We know it as The Sermon on the Mount.

Probably, over several days, He talked about the ethical and moral demands of being a Christian—a follower of Jesus. As He taught the crowds grew. They wanted to be near the Teacher.

Toward the end of His sermon Jesus lays out some warnings—the narrow and wide gates, false prophets and false followers, and building on the wrong foundation. Here He says...

Matthew 7:21-23(NIV) 21“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

1. Some believe they are Christians, but they are not:

If I'm reading this right, there are people who think they are Christians, but they are not. They say religious words and do religious things, but they are not Christians.

Paul's letter to the Colossians reminded us that God loves all humanity without reservation. In other words, He loves everyone. Therefore, His love is unconditional. But that unconditional love has conditions. The most quoted verse from the Bible is...

John 3:16(NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God offers salvation to every man, woman, boy and girl without conditions of merit. But God's unconditional love for everyone does have conditions. For one, we must believe in Jesus!

Think about a young mother having a test of wills with her 2-year old. He wants to continue playing, but it's time for bath. He's already been given a 5-minute grace period. Now she insists.

If he could articulate himself he might say something like this, "If you really loved me you would let me do what I want." A two-year-old cannot articulate that. So they wait until they're a teenager.

Is her love unconditional? Yes, she will love him even if he disobeys. But no, in the sense she is requiring the condition of obedience.

Or what about Dick and Jane who have been married 20 years? She just found out that her husband is unfaithful and wants to continue the relationship.

Not only that, he wants Jane to accept it and to continue the marriage. What does real love mean for Jane in this situation?

If she loves him unconditionally, ladies, shouldn't she accept her husband on his terms as an expression of her love? Or, will genuine love require Jane to say, "It's either her or me"! Authentic love requires faithfulness.

From the very beginning God's love required conditions. God told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil . . ." (Gen. 2:16-17).

As Jesus concludes His Sermon, these verses are His invitation to a true relationship with Him. He has already said that the gate is narrow that leads to life and only a few find it.

He has warned us about listening to the opinions of false teachers. He has told us that by our fruit we will be known. God's authentic love is conditional.

(v. 21) “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father . . .”

As Jesus taught the crowd grew. Jesus is talking to religious people—people who most likely believe that they are on the road to heaven when they really are on the broad road to hell.

We are here to direct people onto the road to heaven. First, we must be sure we are on that road. According to Jesus many who think they are Christians, are not. Why?

2. Some have a false sense of assurance.

According to various polls in recent years the majority of Americans consider themselves to be Christians. Yet, by scriptural standards it is hard to believe all these people are truly saved.

Maybe they listened to a false teacher. Maybe they made a false profession of faith, raised their hand, said a certain prayer.

Now they think they are saved because someone has told them that was all there was to it. That’s not all there is to it. Salvation is the giving, or surrendering of yourself to Jesus Christ.

In 2 Peter 1:3-11 (read). It is the things we do that demonstrates the genuineness of our salvation. Our lives demonstrate increasing qualities of fruitfulness.

3. Some fail to examine their life.

Christians are not perfect. Even after we believe we continue to be tempted to sin. When we sin we do not stop being Christians. But it is impossible to be a true believer and consistently behave like an unbeliever.

The Apostle John said that if we say we have no sin we are deceiving our selves. (1 John 1:8) But the difference between a false Christian and a true believer is that the genuine Christian has longings in his heart for righteousness.

He wants to do right and please God. Yet, there are some professed believers who go through life seemingly oblivious and unconcerned about their sins.

They may have a presumptuous viewpoint about God’s grace. They may think their profession of faith covers everything and it doesn’t matter what they do from then on.

But, a person who is not concerned about his present sins has good reason to doubt that he or she has ever been saved. They have failed to examine their life to see if the presence of Jesus makes a difference.

When a person practices sexual sin, or is deceptive and dishonest in business, or is hateful and vengeful, or habitually practices any sin without remorse or repentance—that person, according to God’s Word is not a Christian.

God’s Word is explicit more so than I can be. “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders (10) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor 6:9-10)

4. Some rationalize their life-style.

Some of us are determined to earn our way into heaven. Some people honestly believe that they are saved because the good things they do balance out the bad, and that the positive outweighs the negative.

So this person gives himself the benefit of the doubt. “I’m okay because I’m trying to lead and live a good life.”

Attending church, hearing sermons, singing songs of the faith, reading the Bible, attending Bible studies, and many other perfectly good and helpful activities are all good and necessary things for a Christian.

But doing them doesn’t make you a Christian, nor does it necessarily mean you are a Christian. These things can cause a believer to think she is being faithful and obedient, when in reality she may not be.

And they may cause an unbeliever to believe he is saved when he is not. Many who say they are Christians believe that they will gain entry into heaven as a consequence of their good works rather than God’s grace through Jesus Christ.

5. Some do not realize the effect of sin.

Many do not understand that it is sin itself that separates from God and condemns people to death and damnation.

It isn't the excess of sin. It isn't the imbalance between good and bad. If our good outweighed the bad, to be right with God, there would not have been a need for the cross.

If there were no conditions on God's unconditional love, He would love and forgive every person no matter what, Jesus wouldn't have had to die on the cross.

Jesus did die on the cross. He did die for our sins. He did take our penalty upon Himself. There is that.

And God will not, He cannot, forgive and accept us except on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice. His unconditional love requires this condition.

The whole issue is obedience to the Word of God. What does it say? In the very words of Jesus, "Only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" will enter the kingdom of heaven.

God's will is that you surrender to Him through Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that there is only one way to be saved from sin and get to heaven. The only way is through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Then the proof of your salvation is that, through His power, you live your life for Him. On this the Bible is equally clear. If a person is really a Christian she will behave like a Christian.

We confess with our lips and believe in our hearts. Then, our actions through this life show we are Christians. What is the condition of God's love? It's simple—He wants our heart!

Application:

God extends His love unconditionally. But his unconditional love has a condition: if you want to be saved and spend eternity in heaven, you must believe in Jesus Christ, and accept Him as your Savior and Lord.