

DOES GOD LOVE THE WORLD OR NOT?

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle”

(1 Cor. 14:8)

While many quote John 3:16 and think it is obvious that God loves the world, there are others who believe that God only loves some in the world. They point out that God hates all the workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5). This, of course, includes us for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). They would also ask how God could destroy all but eight people with a flood if He truly loved them? We are not only told that God hates “things” (Prov. 6:16 - 19), but that he also hates people like Esau (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13). David not only hated those who hated God but he hated them with a perfect hatred (Ps. 139:21, 22). David, as you know, was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). This is important, for if you believe that God hates someone, you will perhaps treat them differently from those whom you believe that God loves.

Thus we ask: “Does God love the world or not”? Or, more to the point, when we see some blasphemous sinner like Saul of Tarsus, we need to ask: “Does God love that sinner or not?” It is important that we answer this question with clarity for if the trumpet sounds an uncertain sound you don’t know whether to go to bed or go to war.. Remember! God is not the Author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Therefore, at least for me, the answer is crystal clear. Yes! God does love the world! And “yes” I believe that God also loves sinners like you and me! Please be patient and we will try to discuss both love and hate as they relate to God.

THE NATURE OF GOD

Let us begin with God. He is the One constant in the universe. He never changes (Mal. 3:6). He is without variation or shadow cast by turning. (Ja. 1:17). While a complete understanding of God’s nature is beyond the finite mind, we can still see in Jesus the fulness of the Godhead in a body (Col. 2:9). The most complete description of God that the human mind is capable of comprehending is fully expressed in Jesus. Note:

- Jesus is the “Word of God” (Jn. 1:1). A word is a vehicle of communication. Thus Jesus communicates to us the nature of God.
- **“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (Jn. 1:18).** The word translated as “declared” is “exegeomai” which means to explain or make known. It is the basis of our English word “egete”. An exegetical sermon is one that merely “explains” the text. Thus Jesus “declares” or “explains” God.
- As we have already mentioned: **“In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in Him . . .” (Col. 2: 9, 10).**
- **And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).**
- God is many things and has many names, but everything man is capable of understanding

about God is encapsulated in Jesus.

GOD IS LOVE

John 3:16 has been called the “Golden Text” of the Bible. It states: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”**

These words are so simple and beautiful that they are inevitably among the first words of Scripture that little children commit to memory. They are also so utterly profound that the wisest of men cannot completely comprehend them. “For God so loved . . . that He gave . . .” In these few words we have not only the world’s greatest giver, but also the world’s greatest gift. Paradoxically both giver and gift are the same for the gift that God gave was Himself.

For God so loved . . . that He gave . . .” The intrinsic nature of God combined with the inherent nature of love provided no other alternative. If God were to be God and love were to be love, it had to be that way. The very nature of God is to love, and the very nature of love is to give. God could not be God without love and love could not be love without giving.

“For God so loved . . . that He gave . . .” Jesus did not count being God something to be grasped but emptied Himself and became a man (Phil. 2:5 - 11). He said “no” to omnipotence and came struggling from a virgin’s womb so utterly helpless that he could not have survived without benevolent care from the very people He had created. His fragile little body was wrapped in swaddling clothes and his tiny lungs were filled with the noxious odor of animal waste and manger dust. But God was God, and love was love, and Christ was on a collision course with destiny.

“For Go so loved . . . that He gave . . .” Jesus put away His carpenter’s tools a final time and turned His back upon the peace and tranquility of Nazareth. Now His life would be characterized by a constant confrontation with sin and evil, sickness and disease. Jesus did not stay on the sidelines, but became involved in the game of life to the hilt. By doing so He brought the beauty of the sunset to blinded eyes, and songs and laughter to deafened ears. He dared to touch the lepers and extended a helping hand to social outcasts and sinners. He made little children laugh and enabled the lame to leap for joy.

“For God so loved . . . that He gave . . .” and the ultimate expression of that love was seen at Calvary. The night before His vicarious death He fell on His face in Gethsemane and cried out “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me”. His sweat turned crimson in the light of the Passover moon and an angel came to minister to Him in His hour of agony and need. “Not My will” He cried, “But Thine be done”. And there, in these poignant words, is the very essence of love for love does not insist upon having it’s own way. True love is so utterly selfless that it inevitably and ultimately finds expression in a benevolent outreach to others. John said it like this: **“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us”** and then he added: **“And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:16)**

John, the Apostle, whom Jesus loved, not only wrote the Gospel of John, but also three epistles and the book of Revelation. Note carefully these inspired words from his first epistle: **“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”** (1 John 4:7-21 KJV)

DOES GOD LOVE THE PEOPLE HE DESTROYS ?

This pointed question forces us to face the reality that the majority of people are not saved and will be condemned by God at the Judgement. While God loves everyone, not everyone loves God. The majority in every generation have chosen to reject the love of God. The way that leads to life is strait and narrow and only a few will find it (Matt. 7:13, 14).

My answer to this probing question, “Does God love the people He destroys” is “Yes!” Yes, I believe that God loves the world. Yes! I also believe that God even loved those sinners who died in the flood. Further, I believe that the nature of God is such that He is not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). When men choose to reject God’s love it is not His fault. Moses pleaded with the people of God with these poignant words: **“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:”** (Deuteronomy 30:19 KJV) As you know, the Hebrews did not choose life.

Not only is the whole world under the condemnation of sin, even most of the Israelites also rejected God. Paul makes reference to this in 1 Cor. 10:1 - 13). Two times in this brief passage Paul states by inspiration that what happened to these Israelites was an example to us (vss. 6, and 11). Let us therefore consider this “example” more carefully.

First, let us establish in the words of Scripture, that God loved the Israelites. While other

passages could be mentioned, these verses from Deuteronomy should be sufficient. Moses said to the Israelites: **“For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth a covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.”** (Deuteronomy 7:6-10 KJV)

THE FACT THAT GOD LOVED ISRAEL, HOWEVER, DID NOT MEAN THAT THEY WOULD AUTOMATICALLY BE SAVED! THIS IS PRECISELY THE REASON PAUL MENTIONS THEM AS AN “EXAMPLE” TO THE CORINTHIANS.

- Read again 1 Cor. 10:1 - 13)
- They all came out of Egypt.
- They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
- They did all eat the same spiritual meat and drink the same spiritual drink.
- BUT WITH MANY OF THEM GOD WAS NOT PLEASED!
- What happened to them is an example to us to not do what they did.
- When we think we are standing, we need to take heed lest we fall.
- We don't have to fall, however. Every temptation we face is common to man and our loving heavenly Father always provides us with a way to escape.
- “Yes!” God loved the Israelites. “No!” most of them did not return His love.

JESUS WAS A MAN OF SORROWS

Isaiah said it clearly: **“He is despised and rejected of man; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”** (Is. 53:3).

Many, if not most, understand the pain and sorrow of rejected love. Love makes us vulnerable. When we love someone we dare to let down our guard and expose our hearts. This vulnerability enables those whom we love to hurt us more deeply than a stranger.

No wonder Jesus was a man of sorrows. He came unto His own and His own received Him not (Jn. 1:11). He came in His Father's name and they rejected Him, but when someone else came in his own name they received him (Jn. 5:43). Jesus loved Jerusalem and wanted to gather her children like a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but they would not (Matt. 23:37). When He looked down on Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives He wept like a baby (Lk. 19:41). (The Greek word used to describe his weeping is “klaio” which Vine in his Word Studies defines as a

loud expression of grief). When asked to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, the people Jesus loved chose Barabbas. When Pilate asked what they wanted to do with Jesus, they shouted “Crucify Him”. The fact that Jesus loved them and wanted them to be saved, however, did not mean that they would love Him and be saved. **“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Cor. 16:22).**

The Prophet Hosea was commanded by God to take a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms, for the land had committed great whoredoms (Hosea 1:2). Can you not imagine the heartbreak Hosea felt when he went to buy back his own wife from prostitution? (Hos. 3:1 - 5). God commanded: **“Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other goes, and love flagons of wine” (Hos. 3:1).**

Yes! Hosea was heart broken over the conduct of his wife, but so also was the father of the prodigal son heart broken. Remember the story! This ungrateful, but beloved son, spurned his father’s love and went into a far country. There he wasted his substance in riotous living (Lk. 15:11 - 32). Just as Hosea was sad and the father of the prodigal was sad, God also must be heartbroken and sad when we reject his love and chose darkness rather than light.

While we can relate to Hosea, the sorrow of God is beyond human comprehension. Logic compels us to assume that the more advanced the creature, the greater is the capacity to feel pain and experience sorrow. Does an insect, for example, experience sorrow when it’s child is stepped on and killed? If so, their pain and sorrow pales into insignificance by comparison to a bird bereft of her young. But animals and birds surely cannot sorrow as do humans? Jeremiah, for example, (the “weeping prophet”) looked at the smouldering ashes of Jerusalem and wrote: **“Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger” (Lam. 1:12).** But even Jeremiah could only experience the sorrow God as through a dark glass. An insect can no more appreciate the sorrow of Jeremiah, than Jeremiah could understand the sorrow of God.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE?

Yes ! Of course there are! A righteous man regards the life of his beast (Prov. 12:10) but not in the same way that he regards the life of his family. Paul instructed Timothy: **“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8).** While we are commanded to “love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17), we love the brotherhood in a different way than we love those of our “own house”. We are to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44), but certainly not in the same way that we love our wife. Yes! God does love the world but He does not love everyone in the world the same way.

While God loves the world, He manifests a special kind of love for His obedient children. Jesus said: **“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father and I will come unto him and make our abode with him” (Jn. 14:23).**

As a point of interest, the Bible word translated as “abode” in Jn. 14:23 is “mone”. It is only found 2 times in the Bible (Jn. 14:2 and 14:23). In vs. 2 it is translate as “mansions” and in vs. 23 it is translated as “abode”. How beautiful! Jesus loves us so much that He is preparing a special “mansion” for us in heaven, and we love Him so much that we prepare a special “abode” for Him in our heart!

MAN LOOKS ON THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

When David was anointed king, and his seven older brothers were rejected, Samuel explained: **“The Lord seeth not as an seeth; for an looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).**

If you take the position that God loves some and hates others, how can you tell which is which? Paul wrote: **“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Cor. 2:11).** God can look into a man’s heart but we cannot!

Jesus, for example, knew that Judas Iscariot was a thief (Jn. 12:6). Not one of the Apostles, however, suspected that was not only a thief, but that he would ultimately betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. They were in constant contact with Judas for three years and never suspected him. They didn’t even suspect him when he left the upper room to betray Jesus. They merely assumed he was going out to buy provisions for the feast, or to give something to the poor (Jn. 13:29).

Jesus commanded that we preach to everyone, so in one respect it shouldn’t matter whether God loves them or not. Obviously it would be futile for us to try and decide which ones God loves, and which ones he doesn’t.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD HATED ESAU?

“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.” (Malachi 1:1-3 KJV)

“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated . . .” (Rom. 9:13).

There you have it! God definitely “hated” Esau. But what does that mean? Does that mean that Esau could not be saved? Does that mean that God did not want him in heaven? Does that mean that it was impossible for Esau to repent of evil? And even more provocative, is it possible that God could both love Esau and hate him at the same time? Yes! The Scriptures call Esau “profane” and he was. He sold his birthright for one morsel of meat (Heb. 12:16). Did God know before he was born that he was going to be “profane” and if so does this mean that Esau was destined to be that way and had no choice in this matter?

Understanding God's hatred of Esau is particularly important because the Scriptures are so specific. In other places we are told in general that God hates sin. Also in a general way we are told that God hates various groups of sinners. Please consider:

- God hates all workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5).
- God abhors the excellency of Jacob and hates his palaces (Amos 6:8).
- God hated the new moons and appointed feasts of His own people (Is. 1:14).
- The Lord loves judgement and hates robbery (Is. 61:8).
- There are 6 things the Lord hates and 7 that are an abomination to Him (Prov. 6:16-19).
- God hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes (Rev. 2:6).
- Even Jesus loves righteousness and hates iniquity (Heb. 1:9).
- Etc.
- While there are many generic states about God and hatred, we are specifically told that God hated Esau!

Again we ask, what does this mean?

Earlier we posited the question: "Is it possible for God to both love Esau and hate him at the same time"? While this may seem ridiculous on the surface, a more in depth focus reveals that it is possible.

To illustrate this possibility, please consider that God commands every man to love his family. To narrow our focus, loving your wife is specifically commanded in Scripture. Note:

- **"Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).**
- **"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself (Eph. 5:28).**
- **Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself (Eph. 5:33)**
- **"Husbands love your wives and be not bitter against them". (Col. 3:19).**
- Etc.

Yet, Jesus specifically commanded anyone who would be His disciple to "hate" his wife as well as other members of his family. Please consider: **"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sister, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"** (Lk. 14:26).

Don't look at me. I didn't say this. Jesus did! Based upon what Jesus said, and what the Scriptures teach, it is possible for a man to love his wife and hate her at the same time. If it were impossible to do, why do the Scriptures command it?

Whatever meaning you assign to "hate" it must accommodate and not contradict the teachings of Jesus. The same terminology of "hating" a wife is also found in the Law of Moses. Please consider: **"If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."** (Deuteronomy 21:15-17 KJV)

The simple explanation to this apparent contradiction is to realize that the word "hate" in these passages merely means to "love less". It is not unreasonable to assume that a man with two wives would love one more than the other. Samuel's father, Elkanah, for example, had two wives and Hannah was his favorite (1 Sam. 1:1 - 8). Thus the command of Christ for a man to "hate" his family merely means that the follower of Christ must give Him priority over every other relationship. Matthew recorded this truth with words from Jesus that are more easily understood. Jesus said: **"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"** (Matt. 10:37). There is no contradiction between the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. Both stated the same truth but in different ways. When a man loves Jesus more than he loves his family, he is "hating" them. This, of course, does not mean that he despises them, but merely that he loves them less than he loves Jesus.

Thus "hating Esau" could merely mean that while God loved both Esau and Jacob, He loved Jacob more.

It is also worthy of note that the passage in Malachi does not refer to the person of Esau, but rather to the Edomites who were his descendants. Esau was already dead at the time Malachi wrote these words. This is also true of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel (Gen.32:28).

- Note! God told Moses: **"And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn."** (Exodus 4:22-23 KJV). This reference to Israel could not possibly apply to him in person for he died many years before (Gen. 49:33).
- As we have already pointed out, the quote from Malachi 1:3 stating "Esau have I hated" is not referring to him personally, as he was already dead. It referred to his descendants the Edomites.
- As we have already mentioned, Esau was called "profane" in Hebrews 12:16 because he valued physical things more than the spiritual. As the "firstborn" son he was in line to

become the priest of the family when Isaac died. Esau, however, despised that spiritual privilege and sold it for a morsel of meat. Note the contrast! While Esau despised his birthright, he sought the blessing carefully with tears (Heb. 12:17)

- Note that while the “birthright” involved spiritual things, the “blessing” involved earthly wealth and power (See Gen. 37:28, 29). Esau was wrong and the Scriptures warn us to avoid being a profane person like him (Heb. 12:15 - 17)
- The point is that the “hatred” of Esau merely means that God chose Jacob (Israel) to be the ancestor of Christ, not Esau. For your information, the term “firstborn” is a title of rank not just the description of the birth order. As you know, Esau and Jacob were twins, and Esau physically came out first. God, however, gave the honor of being the “firstborn” to Jacob. Jacob (Israel) wanted to be the “firstborn” and Esau didn’t. Thus God called Israel “my firstborn” as we see in Ex. 4:22. How sad that anyone would choose earthly wealth over a relationship with Christ!
- Genesis 36 is devoted to Esau and his family. He did have many children and considerable wealth, but he was not honored as the ancestor of Christ. As we have said, in this respect he was “hated” or given second place. Even his earthly posterity, however, never attained the glory experienced by David and Solomon, for as Malachi wrote: **“I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness” (Mal. 1:3).**

IF GOD LOVES THE WORLD, WHOM SHOULD WE LOVE?

It is easy to become so focused on theological controversies that we experience the “paralysis of analysis” and lose sight of the conduct God expects of His children.

When asked : **“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:36 - 40).**

These inspired words are both simple and profound. In particular note there is no “third” priority. Everything in the Law and in the Prophets was summarized by Jesus in only these two commandments.

A certain lawyer knew these commandments but in an effort to justify himself asked: **“And who is my neighbour?” (Lk. 10:29).**

That’s when Jesus told the story of the “Good Samaritan” (See Lk. 10:30 - 37). When the priest and the Levite saw a man in need they not only did not help, they even avoided the man and “passed by on the other side”. Then a “certain Samaritan” not only helped with the man with his immediate needs, but made provision to help him later. Jesus concluded the story by saying **“Go, and do thou likewise” (Lk. 10:37).**

Throughout all of recorded history man has consistently missed the message of love. Please consider:

- This is the message you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another and not be like Cain (1 Jn 3:11, 12). Cain “talked” with his brother before killing him and Adam Clarke suggested that this might have been the first religious debate.
- Isaiah lamented that the religious people of his day were more interested in religious rituals and debate than in relieving the oppressed and ministering to the needs of the poor and hungry (Is. 58:1 - 7).
- Micah wrote that it was more important to “do justly”, “love mercy”, and “walk humbly” with God than to merely make animal sacrifices and follow religious rituals (Micah 6:6 - 8).
- Paul told Timothy that the reason why God gave His commandments was to produce love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned (1 Tim. 1:5).
- James said that pure and undefiled religion was to take care of the fatherless and widows and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (Ja. 1:27).
- Jesus described the Judgement as a time when our actions take priority over our theology. What you “believe” about some theological position is not as important as what you “do” with reference to your fellow man. Those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, lodged the stranger, and visited the sick will be happy they did so on the day of Judgement. (Matt. 25:31 - 46)
- Please remember that Job understood the message of love centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Job did not just pray and make sacrifices, he delivered the poor and the fatherless, ministered to the dying and the widows, etc. (See Job 29:12 - 17).

IT IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR US TO MANIFEST OUR OWN LOVE FOR OTHERS RATHER THAN SPECULATE ABOUT GOD AND THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES!

THEREFORE, WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE IN NEED, PLEASE PAUSE TO CONSIDER THAT THE ONE IN NEED IS YOUR NEIGHBOR AND THAT GOD EXPECTS YOU TO LOVE HIM IN THE SAME WAY YOU LOVE YOURSELF.

These thoughts were written by Boyce Mouton and can be used in whole, or in part, in any way that will bring glory to Jesus Christ.