

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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“Unconditional Love”

William Beasley

This short phrase has been thrown around, used, mistreated and abused by many people. The sad truth is that many (perhaps, most) who use it do not really understand love and have confused love with something else. To learn concerning love one has but to go to the example of the greatest *Lover* of all time. I hesitated to use the word *Lover* since, sadly, there are those who confuse, even in their own minds, *love* with sex. The *Lover* of Whom I speak is God!

Many passages show/teach the unconditional nature of His love:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life”

(John 3:16).

“Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten

of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7).

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

No conditions have been set on the love of John 3:16; that is, no conditions had to be met before God the Father send His only begotten Son to become the sacrifice for sin. The same thing could be said of the love of 1 John 3:16. This, as is evident, speaks not of God the Father, but of Jesus Christ, God the Son. This manifestation of God’s love was/is for all of mankind (short, tall, fat, skinny, beautiful, ugly, black, white, etc.). There are no conditions set on the Father giving His Son, nor on Jesus going to the cross.

At the same time there are passages which must be understood to place conditions on the love of God. First century Christians were told to ***“keep yourselves in the love of God”*** (Jude 20). Even a blind man can see that a condition or conditions must be met to obey this injunction. One might say that this is simple telling us to “Walk in keeping with what the love of God teaches.”

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This “keeping” (i.e., obedience) then becomes a condition (conditional love), or (and this is where many confuse *love* with *acceptance*) the love of God does not mean that God automatically accepts how one lives. God loves those who refuse to ***“keep (self) in the love of God”*** (Jude 20), but that love does not insure the recipient thereof of God’s approval, or of His blessings.

In 1 John 4:7 we learn that ***“love is of God.”*** He is the One to teach us what love is and how to love. In 1 John 4:8 we have the sublime statement that ***“God is love.”*** Other beings may manifest love, or have love as one of the characteristics of life, but ***“God is love.”*** Love is the very essence, nature and being of Him Whom we serve.

We, too, have the capacity to love and to react appropriately unto God’s love. It is imperative that we understand what it means for us to love God. Once again, we turn to the One Who ***“is love,”*** for understanding.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

“If ye love me, ye will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Since we have God’s examples of unconditional love and since we have the capacity to love, why would it be said that many do

not understand love (unconditional love)?

Children have been known to become very upset with a parent who refused to either give something that was wanted, had the audacity to deprive the child of a prized possession, refused permission to join in a desired activity, or, when the child is older, object to the kind of life lived. These children have cried out in anger and frustration, “You don’t love me!”

Permission may have been withheld because the parent, motivated by love and concern for the child and with greater knowledge and experience, knew of the physical or spiritual dangers associated with the activity. The child (now in a physically mature body) might even argue, “You should love me unconditionally, and let me make my own decisions.” These children have confused love with the gratification of a desire. They do not understand love!

The love of God (God to man) spoken of in John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16 is unconditional, but the rest of that story has not been told. God’s love for all of mankind does not mean that all who have lived will be with Him in heaven. In fact, we are told just the opposite. Only a ***“few”*** (in comparison to the ***“many”***) will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14). Yes, the love is unconditional, but God’s blessings

have conditions attached. In speaking of Jesus Christ, the Hebrew writer said, **“and having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey Him the Author of eternal salvation”** (Hebrews 5:9).

Some older children have been known to say such things as, “Love me unconditionally. Accept me as I am.” **“God is love,”** but He does not accept people as they are! The Jews of Acts 2 were the recipients of God unconditional love (they were included in **“the world”** [John 3:16]), but the first thing they were told to do, when seeking forgiveness, was to **“Repent”** (Acts 2:38)! **“God is love,”** but He told these, His creation, to change. In fact, repentance (i.e., a change of mind which brings about a change of conduct) is commanded of all men, everywhere (see Acts 17:30). God loved the world unconditionally, but He demands that His children **“Come ye out from among them** (i.e, the world or worldliness), **and be ye separate . . . And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you”** (2 Corinthians 6:17).

It is feeble-mindedness or wishful thinking to confuse *unconditional love* with a desired toy, permission to attend a concert, the living of an immoral, degenerate life style, or the guaranteed reception of God’s blessings.

If there were anything to the concept that *unconditional love* cures all relationships, then it must be a two-way street. If *unconditional love* means that parents must accept children as they are, then *unconditional love* would have to mean that the children accept the parents as they are (i.e., un-accepting of the life style of the child). If it is wrong (because of unconditional love) for a parent or a brother/sister-in-Christ to rebuke because one is living a wayward life, then it would certainly be wrong (because of unconditional love) for the one rebuked to speak against (rebuke) the fellow Christian or parent for having rebuked in the first place. When you hear one crying out about *unconditional love* and *total acceptance*, you can know that they speak of a one-way street. You accept me, but I jolly well will not accept your interference (even when [perhaps, especially when] it is motivated by a loving concern for the spiritual/eternal well-being of the child or fellow Christian)!

Don’t confuse love with a desired toy, permission to attend a social event, or quiet acceptance of a life style. It is *unconditional love* that pushes a parent to correct, guide, and, when necessary, discipline children. What is here said about the parent-child relation, is just as appropriate to the spiritual sibling relationships in the Lord’s church. **“Now we command you,**

brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). It is *unconditional love* which causes the parent or brother/sister to suffer heartache, emotional stress, frustration, and, at times, even physical disabilities when the object of that love lives in rebellion to God.

Our loving (**“God is love”**) heavenly Father does not accept people as they are, nor does he expect/want His children to accept people as they are. God expects His children (even those who are parents) to **“reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching”** (2 Timothy 4:2b).

EDITOR’S NOTE: This article is a bit different than we might normally think. However, re-read it again slowly – William Beasely has a very good point that he is making. Our society has turned to a “me society” and we have become “numb” to authority especially the authority of God!

VBS – June 18 –

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9:30 – 11:00

A.M.

Get out and
invite for
June 17th
invite night!