



**THE PROBLEM WITH  
LOVE**

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# PROBLEMET MED KJÆRLIGHET



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*A sure way for Christians  
to get off track is to take  
one part of the truth  
and make it the whole truth*

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# The problem with love

Some years ago I heard some teaching that challenged my theological views. My first thought was “*This must be wrong*”, but I had one dilemma – scripturally it seemed to be right.

I’ve always tried to have an open mind when it comes to thoughts and ideas that are different from my own and I’ve always made an effort to try and understand what someone is trying to communicate before I form my opinion on the subject. Therefore, I decided to do some checking myself to see if what I heard was right. As I was investigating the claims, more and more I realised how much my own views had been influencing my understanding of the Bible.

The teaching did not really challenge my view of God, but rather the way I presented Him to other people. I discovered that many of the things I was saying were more influenced by what I had heard others say than by what the Bible said.

I therefore plead with you who are reading this booklet to try and have an open mind. Don't believe me just because I say something, but check it for yourself.

All of us are coloured by our "favourite preachers" and that is OK. The problem starts when we accept what they say just because they said it, and don't study the Word for ourselves.

Whether we like it or not, all of us are being influenced by the world around us and that is why we constantly need to renew our mind. If we're not aware of how our culture is shaping our thinking, we will easily adopt thoughts and attitudes that might seem right, but don't line up with the Word of God.

We need to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11. They received Paul's teaching with an open mind, and then checked the scriptures to see if he was right.

If you notice your "favourite preacher" saying something that is not completely in line with the Bible, it does not mean that he's a false prophet. None of us has the complete truth and as the Apostle Paul said "...we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1. Cor. 13:9). If a false prophet was one who does not have a 100% correct theology, then we would all be false prophets.

Let's be open for God to adjust our course when needed – and for all of us that is needed at times. Let us not be too quick to judge those who see things differently, but rather ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand.



# What is our focus

The first statement that challenged me was that many focus more on God's love than the Bible does.

I was sure that this must be wrong. Not because there was a lack of focus on God's love, but because everyone knows that love is the main theme of the Bible.

However, there is a problem with the things "everybody knows", and that is because everybody knows, nobody checks.

When I heard this statement I decided to go through the Bible to see how much it actually talks about love. To my astonishment I realised that there were many books in the Bible that never mentioned it.

What shocked me the most was that many of these books or letters were in the New Testament. Books like the Gospel of Matthew, Luke and Mark never mention the love of God and neither does the Book of Acts. Even several of the letters never mention the love of God.

Now, some of these books or letters talk about the goodness of God, which we can consider an expression of love, but none of them specifically talks about the love of God.

When you listen to modern preaching, you can easily get the impression that the issue of love fills every page in the Bible. But how does that line up with the fact that there are so many books and letters in the Bible that never mention it?

The Bible should, after all, be our source when it comes to preaching, so shouldn't there be a correlation between what the Bible is emphasising and what preachers preach?

You might say "*everyone knows that love fills every page in the Bible*", but is this one of the things everyone knows but nobody checks?

If you take a Bible dictionary and go through the whole Bible, looking for verses that describe God's nature, you will find that love is definitely not the character trait of God the Bible highlights the most – actually it's quite far down on the list.

When I first heard this, it actually made me a little irritated and I was sure this was wrong. So I logged on to the Internet and searched through the Bible for verses that described God. I found verses talking about Him as "*...a God of truth and without injustice...*", or "*...Righteous and upright...*"

(Deut. 32:4). Other verses described Him as being a “...*just judge*...” (Psalm 7:11), gracious and merciful (Psalm 116:5) and good (Mark 10:18)

As I was going through the Bible this way, it became obvious to me that God is a good God. You find many descriptions of Him as “*righteous*”, “*good*”, “*merciful*”, “*gracious*”, “*slow to anger*” and so on. Jesus also made it very clear that God is a good Father that even extended his goodness to the unjust (Matt. 5:45).

Even though being merciful, good and gracious is an expression of love, what surprised me was that there was actually only ONE VERSE that specifically described God as love – in 1. John 4:8.

There are many scriptures describing Him as righteous, holy and powerful. Again and again He is being referred to as a judge but only one time is He specifically described as love.

When you listen to much of today’s preaching you easily get the impression that 90% of the Bible’s focus is on God as love, and 10% is on Him as a judge – but it would actually be more accurate to turn it around.

## **GOD IS A GOOD AND LOVING GOD**

I am not trying to say that God is not loving, or present Him as a hard and grumpy old man. I think,

however, it's worth noticing that even though the Bible says God is love, this is not its main emphasis.

Even when we talk about the Gospel, the Bible puts a bigger emphasis on it being a message of God's righteousness than on His love.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. **For in it the righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

— ROMANS 1:16-17

In our culture love is a popular topic and an easy message to preach. I am afraid that in an attempt to be culturally relevant many have chosen to focus on the love of God rather than His righteousness or holiness.

Think about it. When you read about people in the Bible who got a close encounter with God, love was never the first word that came out of their mouth. Holiness was the first thing that struck them. You never read about the angels before the throne of God saying "Love, love, love, God is love", but you do read about them saying "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 4:8).

## **GOD'S PRESENCE CAN BE TERRIFYING**

None who got a close encounter with God in the Bible got tempted to jump up in His lap – instead, they were struck with awe and fear.

When Isaiah saw the throne of God, his reaction was “...*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.*” (Isa 6:5)

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel we see him struck with fear (Dan 8:17) and when He later had a new encounter with God he says “...*no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength..*” (Dan 10:8).

We see the same reaction in the New Testament when John encountered Jesus in the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:12-17). He got struck with fear and fell to the ground as if he was dead.

All through the Bible we see an awe and reverence for the presence of God and very often, when people encountered God or saw angels, they were struck with fear.

This does not mean that it's terrible to be in the presence of God or that we need to be afraid of Him, but we should not lose sight of the fact that His holiness is as a consuming fire for those who

are not right with Him (Heb 12:29). Yes, He is a good and loving Father but this does not mean that we can skip the reverence or holiness part.

In fact, the Bible states clearly that an intimate fellowship with God – a fellowship where He shares His secrets – is reserved for those who fear Him (Psalm 25:14).

It's true that Jesus taught us to relate to God as a good Father, but that does not mean that He didn't teach to fear Him as well. Listen to what He says in Matthew 10:28.

...do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. **But rather fear Him** who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

— MATTHEW 10:28

When we talk to people about God, we should of course present Him as good and loving. However, if we only say that God is love and fail to inform them that there are things they need to repent from – then it will not be the love of God they will encounter when they die.

# Are we speaking the same language?

The challenge with our focus on love is that people do not respond to what we say but to what they hear – and that is not always the same thing. It is possible to preach a correct message about love, but get people to totally misunderstand what we are trying to say – because their definition of love is sometimes different.

If I ask you to mention a Bible verse that speaks about God's love, then there is a good possibility that you mention John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

— JOHN 3:16

I think this is one of the most known verses and without a doubt it clearly speaks about God's love - but what kind of love? What does it mean that God loves the world?

For many years I had problems understanding how John 3:16 could say that God loved the world, and then John 3:36 said that the wrath of God is abiding on those who do not believe in Jesus.

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

— JOHN 3:36

## THE CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

I have always been against taking scriptures out of context, so I have to admit I was a bit embarrassed when someone asked me what John 3:14-15 said. Of course I knew John 3:16 very well, but I had to admit that I had never paid any attention to the context it was written in. So I opened my Bible to check, and in John 3:14-15 it says:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world...

— JOHN 3:14-15

Suddenly I noticed that verse 16 starts with “*For God so loved...*” and realised that this can give the

verse two directions. One of them is God loving the world SO MUCH that He gave His Son – and this is how you would read it if you read only verse 16.

However, when you read verse 16 in context with verses 14-15, it points backwards, to what had just been said – “...*For God so loved the world...*”.

My first question then was: “*What in the world does Moses and the serpent in the wilderness have to do with God’s love?*” According to the context, the story of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness is an example of how God loved the world. I decided therefore to check and look up Numbers, chapter 21 to find out.

### **MOSES AND THE BRONZE SERPENT**

The summary of the story of Moses and the bronze serpent is as follows:

The people of Israel, as many times before, got discourage – even though God had just given them victory in battle. They started to murmur and speak against God and against Moses – and this made God angry. The result was that God sent fiery serpents among the people and because of this many died. The people then turned to Moses and

said *“We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us”*. It does not say that God removed the fiery serpents, but God gave Moses a solution to the problem. He told Moses to *“Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.”*

When we look at this story, we see what the Bible means by the word “love”, when it says that *“For God so loved the world...”*. When John starts verse 16, he is referring back to verses 14-15.

The love we see in the story of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness is love based on compassion.

God loved the people of Israel, but it was not a “pink kind of love”. He did not choose to save them because they were such wonderful people, but because He is compassionate.

We should also notice that He did not automatically save everyone, but He provided a solution, so that those who were willing to obey His terms could get saved.

This is a different kind of love than what is often presented when the Gospel is preached

today. I have often heard preachers say things like “*God is so in love with you*”, “*He thinks you are so wonderful*” or “*He is just crazy for you*”, when they preach to unsaved people.

In one sense this is true, but we have to keep in mind that people don’t respond to what we say, but to what they hear. When preaching about love, we should make sure that it’s the biblical understanding of love we are presenting and not our cultural understanding.

The amazing thing about God’s love is that He loves us even though we don’t deserve it – He loves us despite all our failures. Even though we have nothing to boast about and have totally missed His standard for greatness, He is still reaching out to us.

When this is revealed to us, the love of God will become even greater and we will truly start to appreciate His grace. After all, you can only do that when you see your need for grace.

However, if we only preach love without helping people to see their sin, they will not really understand their need for grace.

God does not look down at the world with a “you are so beautiful” kind of love, but with the

compassionate kind of love. He loves the world like a father loves a child that has totally made a mess of his or her life – like in the story of the prodigal son. A love based on HIS COMPASSION and not on OUR BEAUTY.

# Why does the world need salvation?

Many preach the Gospel, proclaiming how much Jesus loves them, and then they invite people to get saved. However, when you think about it, this doesn't make much sense.

Do I need to be saved BECAUSE Jesus loves me? Is it BECAUSE God is good that I need to be saved? Salvation means to be rescued, and I don't need to be rescued because Jesus loves me, or because God is good.

It's because of His love and goodness that I am being offered salvation, but it's not the reason WHY I NEED IT. Helping people to see WHY they need a Saviour is important, because they will not seek something they don't think they need.

The world needs salvation because it's perishing, or in clearer terms – people are on their way to Hell with no way of saving themselves. However, because God is merciful and compassionate, He has provided a solution.

Like in the story of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness, which John 3:16 is referring to, He has not automatically saved everyone – but He has provided A SOLUTION for everyone. As John 3:16 says “...*whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life...*”

John 3:16 is not implying that God looks down with love at His creation because He thinks everyone is so beautiful. It says that God, with compassionate love, looks down at a world that is perishing because of the fiery serpents of sin. And because of His compassion He has chosen to give us a remedy – a way of salvation.

## **HOW DO WE DEFINE LOVE?**

I have called this booklet “*The problem with love*”, and some have without a doubt thought: “*Can there be any problems with love?*”. Well, love is not a problem, but people’s different definitions of love can cause trouble.

For many in our modern society love means that you don’t judge other people. You accept them for who they are without trying to impose your ideas or views on them. If someone is gay, the loving thing to do is to embrace them for who they are and accept their lifestyle.

This is of course not the biblical definition of love, because the Bible is very clear that even though God is love, He does not accept people's sinful lifestyle. The fact that He is a loving God does not mean that He will not judge. According to Paul, there will come a day when He will judge all people (Acts 17:31).

I have often talked with people who have the attitude that if the Christian message is true and there is a God, then everything will be OK. After all, the message they have heard is that God is love, so He will not send anyone to Hell. As long as they try to be good, God will not judge them.

They have heard a message of love and interpreted it as they understand love. So even though the Christians they have been talking to have had good intentions, they have actually ended up giving these people a false image of God.

I think most Christians would agree that the world's definition of love is not the same as God's definition – and here lies the problem. If I preach a message of love to people with a different understanding of love, I am bound to be misunderstood.

The love John 3:16 talks about has to be a love that gives room for the wrath John 3:36

mentions – because both verses are referring to the same God.

## **DID GOD LOVE ADOLF HITLER?**

If I asked you: “*Did God love Mother Theresa?*”, you would most probably have no problem saying yes.

However, if I asked you: “*Did God love Adolf Hitler?*” – what would you answer?

John 3:16 says that God loved the world, so that includes Adolf Hitler. However, I don’t think God looked down at Adolf Hitler with love in His eyes, saying: “*Oh, what a wonderful and beautiful little man. I am just so crazy in love with him.*”.

I don’t think God looks down at people involved in human trafficking, murderers, pedophiles, rapists or serial killers, with love in His eyes. In fact, the Bible clearly states that there are some people God hates.

Psalms 11:5 says that He hates the wicked and those who love violence. Psalm 5:6 says that He abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

Jesus was a clear expression of God’s love, but I don’t think the Pharisees felt the love of God when Jesus told them that their “*...inward part is full of greed and wickedness...*” (Luk 11:39),

when He called them “...*whitewashed tombs...*” (Matt 23:27), or when He said to them “...*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?...*” (Matt 23:33).

I am sure that Jesus loved the Pharisees, too, in the sense John 3:16 talks about the love of God, but there were things in their lives they needed to change before they could experience the same grace the woman caught in adultery experienced (John 8:1-11).

Some might say that “*God loves the sinner, but He hates the sin*” and this sounds so right that many probably think it’s a Bible verse. But did you know that the one who framed this sentence was Mahatma Gandhi?

The Bible makes it very clear that God can’t separate the sin from the sinner and that is why we have to be born again – we need salvation.

If God could separate sin from the sinner, He could send the sin to Hell and save the sinner. However, the Bible teaches that we need to die with Christ and be born again in order to be separated from our sin.

It is true that God loves the sinner, but hates the sin in the sense John 3:16 talks about God’s love, but John 3:16 does not imply that God is OK with the sinner.

According to John 3:16 God doesn't look down at this world with love in His eyes – in the sense this world understands love. According to how the story of Moses and the serpents in the wilderness explains Gods love it is with a love based on compassion.

Even though God loves the world He is saddened when He looks down at it, just as He was saddened when He looked down at the earth after the fall of Man.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

— GENESIS 6:5-6

God does not change and He is just as grieved over sin today as He was in Genesis 6. However, because of His compassion He has provided a solution to our sin problem. Now we have the possibility of getting all our sins forgiven.

This doesn't mean that He will spare those who live in sin from His wrath, but He will do so with those who accept His offer.

In the story of Moses and the serpents in the wilderness God did not choose to save the people of Israel because they were so beautiful and great. Listen to what God says about the Israelites in Exodus 32:9-10:

And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

— EXODUS 32:9-10

God said this about the people of Israel, even though they were His chosen nation. He had good plans for them and wanted to bless them. If they wanted His blessings, however, it would have to be on His terms. Even though He knew they were far from perfect, He still showed mercy towards them.

You might say that this is the Old Testament, but then you have to remember that Paul told New Testament believers that the things written in the Old Testament "*...became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted...*" (1. Cor 10:6). He also told New

Testament believers that the Old Testament  
“...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,  
for instruction in righteousness...” (2. Tim 3:16).

# Is the Gospel a message of love?

When a person gets saved they don't need to live in fear of the wrath of God. The Bible is full of scriptures that talk about how God loves His children – how He looks at us as perfect, blameless, holy and beautiful. However, John 3:36 makes it very clear that if someone does not believe in Jesus it's not the love of God they will experience when they die.

When we preach the Gospel, we need to be clear about this, just like Paul when He was preaching to the people at Areopagus in Acts chapter 17.

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

— ACTS 17:30-31

When Peter spoke to those gathered at Cornelius' house, he said Jesus had commanded them to:

“...preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

— ACTS 10:42-43

In fact, you can go through the whole Bible and study every single time the Gospel is preached to unsaved people, and you will never see them talking about how much Jesus loves them. The topics the first Christians talked about when they preached the Gospel were:

- Jesus as the Messiah (Saviour)
- Jesus as risen from the dead
- Repentance
- Forgiveness of sin
- Judgment day

According to Romans 1:16 the Gospel is the message of God's righteousness and not a message of His love – at least not in the way this world understands love.

I'm not saying that it's always wrong to tell people that Jesus loves them, but in doing so we need to be aware of what the listener can hear.

We also need to understand that God does not look at the sinner in the same way as He looks at His children.

You might say that “we are all the children of God”, but that is only in the sense that we are all created by Him. In this sense even the devil is a child of God – and in the Book of Job he is therefore mentioned among the sons of God.

However, this is not what the Bible talks about when it says that we BECOME the children of God when we believe in Jesus (John 1:12). Not everyone is a child of God in the sense of being BORN BY GOD (John 3:3,5-6).

This is why Jesus told the Pharisees that they had the devil as their father (John 8:44-45). God was their Father in the sense that they were also created by Him, but not born of Him – they had not been born again.

## **HOW TO TALK TO PEOPLE**

I don't believe in formalising the methods of what to say when we talk to people – we should rather be led by the Holy Spirit, but I do believe that people who want to get saved need to know

WHY they need salvation.

When we look at Jesus, we see Him approaching people very differently. The rich young ruler in Luke chapter 18 was met with the 10 commandments, as Jesus tried to open his eyes to the fact that only God is good.

When Jesus met Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19, He did not mention the law at all, but just invited Himself to dinner.

When He met the woman at the well, in John chapter 4, he gently but firmly pointed His finger at her sin.

However, in John chapter 8, when the woman caught in adultery was brought to Him, His message was “...*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.*” (John 8:11).

I think we can conclude from these examples that when someone thought they were “good enough”, Jesus used the law in order to open their eyes to the holiness of God.

When people knew their need for forgiveness, He did not lift His finger against them, but extended His grace towards them – because they knew WHY they needed salvation.

When people try to hide their sin (like the woman at the well) He will gently but firmly

bring the sin to the surface in hope that they will repent. When they do, their sins will be washed away and their relationship with God will be restored.

In Jesus' own words:

For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

— MATTHEW 18:11

We need to help people see their own need for a Saviour before they seek Him. We need to help them see THEIR NEED for grace if we want them to truly appreciate it.

Jesus said that it was those who see how much they have been forgiven that will love much (Luk 7:47). By choosing to only focus on love, and skipping issues like sin and judgment, we are robbing people of the ability to truly appreciate grace and love Jesus.



# Can a loving God be angry?

Many have the idea that a loving God cannot be angry at the same time, but why should this be such a strange thought?

As parents we love our children, but I think most of us will admit that there are times when we get angry with our children. When this happens we don't stop loving them, and this is of course not an excuse to hurt them.

The problem with human anger is that it often has a tendency to spin out of control, but with God this is never the case.

God is not as us humans and His emotional capabilities are much greater than we can ever imagine. After all, we have to remember that He sees everything that happens at the same time. He is able to rejoice over the good, grieve with the hurting and be angry at the wicked at the same time – because He is God.

This can be hard to fully understand, but I think it is important that we don't drag the love

of God down to a human level. His love is much greater than that and His emotional capacity is much bigger than ours.

Our view of God as a loving Father must never diminish our view of Him as an almighty, holy and righteous God. Both views are at the same time equally true. He is love, but that love will never influence His justice. He is merciful, but His mercy will never make Him turn a blind eye to evil.

However, because of His love and mercy He has provided a solution, where being fully righteous, He can “...wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us” and nail them to the cross (Col 2:14).

Yes, God can be both loving and angry at the same time, but his anger with the sinner does not exclude His love for him.

Whether someone wants to be under His wrath or under His love is entirely up to them. He has provided a way to have our sins forgiven and our relationship with Him restored – so now the choice is ours.

## **GOD HAS MADE HIS LOVE AVAILABLE**

Does God love the sinner? This is an important question where I think we need to be clear.

Yes, according to John 3:16 God does love the sinner, but when someone asks “Does God love sinners?” we should find out what they mean.

If you understand love as described in John 3:14-15, then I would say “Yes, God loves the sinner”. But if you are asking if God is looking down at the sinner with love and admiration because of THEIR beauty or goodness, then I would say “no”.

When people hear Christians talk about how much God loves them, their understanding of love leads them to believe that God is OK with them as they are, so now they think that everything will be fine.

This is in contrast with the message in John 3:16, which says that the world is in trouble, but since God loves the world He has made salvation AVAILABLE for everyone WHO BELIEVES IN JESUS.

God does not look down at a sinner with a “candyfloss-kind-of-love” in His eyes, but because He is merciful and compassionate He is offering the sinner to get reconciled with Him. This is what Paul is talking about in 2. Corinthians 5:18-20.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in

Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

— 2. CORINTHIANS 5:18-20

The terms for reconciliation have already been arranged, so now the only missing part is us accepting the terms. As believers we are called to plead with people to do that, so they can get reconciled with God.

# Is God's love unconditional?

Some will say that there are no terms, and they will point to Ephesians 2:8, saying that we are saved by grace alone because God's love is unconditional. Yes, it's because of God's grace we are saved, but that does not mean there are no terms. Let's take a look and see what Ephesians 2:8 really says.

For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,  
— EPHESIANS 2:8

Did you notice the phrase “...*through faith*...”? Paul is saying that it's BY GRACE that we now are saved THROUGH FAITH. In other words FAITH is the medicine that saves us, and since we don't deserve it, it's been given to us BY GRACE.

Some preachers are putting a lot of emphasis on the unconditional love of God, but here it's important to have the terms right.

God's love is unconditional in the sense that there are no conditions we can live up to in order to deserve it. There are no conditions when it comes to WHO this love is offered to – it is extended to everyone. We have done nothing to deserve it, fulfilled no condition, or in any way made ourselves worthy.

However, His love is not unconditional in the sense that I can do whatever I want and still receive His love.

We also have to separate between “loved by God” and “getting saved”. John 3:16 says God loves the world, and in that sense His love is unconditional – because it's for everyone.

However, the fact that God loves everyone does not mean that everyone will get saved. He has made His love AVAILABLE for everyone, but that does not imply that everyone will automatically experience it.

People will use scriptures like 1. Chronicles 16:34 to say that God's mercy endures forever. Yes, it's true, but that does not mean it's unconditional. It just means that He will always be merciful and extend His grace to those who receive it. The verse does not say, however, that everyone will automatically experience God's love and mercy, no matter how they live.

There are other verses people use, like Jeremiah 31:10, that talk about an everlasting love, and then they conclude that God will always love us – and yes, that’s true. He will always be kind, merciful and compassionate, but that does not mean that we can do whatever we want and still EXPERIENCE it.

If we are not clear on this, we can very easily give people an impression that no matter what they do God will not be angry with them, but will rather show them His love.

Some might use Matthew 5:45, where it says that God “... *makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust...*”, to indicate that God is good even towards the evil ones – and it’s true that God extend His goodness even towards them.

The fact that God is giving evil people time to repent is a sign of His goodness. Being willing to forgive them is a sign of His love and mercy, and in a general sense He is showing them goodness in that he lets them enjoy the sunshine and the rain.

This does not mean, however, that they will escape His judgment when they die because he only way to do so is through Jesus Christ.

If I had committed a crime it would be foolish of me to use the judge's goodness as an argument for not being judged. If the judge was good, that would mean that He would not turn a blind eye to what I had done.

I believe most Christians would agree that not everyone will be saved, but the way many talk about God's love being unconditional basically indicates that.

I've heard people quote 2. Timothy 2:13 like this: "*...If we are faithless, He remains faithful...*", but then they have not really read this passage.

First of all, this is not the whole verse, because the last sentence says "*...He cannot deny Himself*". Secondly, if you read this verse in context it becomes very clear that Paul is not saying that if we are faithless and live in sin, God will save us anyway because He is still faithful.

Let's take a look at the context of this verse.

This is a faithful saying: **For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.** If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. **If we deny Him, He also will deny us.** If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

— 2. TIMOTHY 2:11-13

Did you notice the part that said “... *If we deny Him, He also will deny us*” or the part that said “... *He cannot deny Himself*”? Not to mention that Paul starts this paragraph off by saying that we need to die with Christ in order to live with Him.

In Romans 6:34 it says that the consequence of sin is death, so if God cannot deny Himself, He will have to keep His word. Even if He loves us, He will still have to judge us according to His own Word.



# How do we get saved?

As we mentioned earlier, faith is the medicine that saves us and since God is gracious, He gives it to us even if we don't deserve it – so we get it by grace.

It's important to have a clear understanding of this when we preach the Gospel. Because of wrong teaching in this area many to hold on to GRACE, thinking that will save them, instead of holding on to FAITH IN CHRIST.

You may think this is nitpicking details, but I believe being unclear about them can have serious consequences. If people got saved just because God is gracious then even satanists would be saved. You could be a Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim and still go to heaven, just because God will always be gracious.

It is not GRACE IN ITSELF that saves us, but because He is gracious, He is offering us salvation.

The Bible is VERY clear that it's FAITH IN JESUS that saves us and in the letter to the Romans Paul goes so far as saying that it's faith in Jesus that gives us access to God's grace.

Therefore, having been justified **by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access **by faith into this grace** in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

— ROMANS 5:1-2

Again and again the Bible makes this point very clear and I would like to show you just a few of the verses that confirm this.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to **those who believe** in His name:

— JOHN 1:12

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

— JOHN 3:16

“**He who believes** in Him is not condemned; but he who does **not believe** is condemned already, because he has **not believed** in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

— JOHN 3:18

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. **He who believes** in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives **and believes** in Me shall never die...

— JOHN 11:25-25

To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, **whoever believes** in Him will receive remission of sins.”

— ACTS 10:43

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, **through faith** in Jesus Christ, to all... to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who **has faith** in Jesus... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified **by faith** apart from the deeds of the law.

— ROMANS 3:21-22, 26, 28

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law **but by faith** in Jesus Christ, even **we have believed** in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified **by faith** in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

— GALATIANS 2:16

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise **by faith** in Jesus Christ might be given to **those who believe**.

— GALATIANS 3:22

There are many more verses like this, but this should be sufficient to show that the Bible is very clear – if we want salvation, then faith is the key.

# What is faith?

But what does it mean to believe or have faith in Jesus? Some think mere believing that Jesus existed is having faith, but this is not the faith the Bible talks about. Even believing that Jesus is God and that He rose from the grave is not necessarily a SAVING FAITH.

James 2:19 says that even demons believe in Jesus. They are well aware that He is God and that He rose from the dead – but they are not saved.

In the Bible, faith is the right response to the Gospel, and that is why James is connecting faith and works. He is not saying that we are saved BY works, but he is saying that if we truly believe, our faith will PRODUCE a response.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ... Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead... But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ...

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ...You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

— JAMES 2:14, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26

If I am standing in the middle of the road and you cry out to me: “*Ronald! Get out of the road! There is coming a car!*”. I will not be “saved” from being driven over, unless I respond to your message.

I might believe you are telling the truth. I might believe that you are a good guy. I might even start a fan club and get your name written on my T-shirt. But unless I respond to your message by jumping out of the road, I will not be saved.

Noah believed God’s warning about the flood, but if he had not built the ark his faith would not have saved him. You could say works made his faith function.

## **GOD IS WAITING FOR OUR RESPONSE**

Life is like playing chess. God has done His move, namely sending His son to die for the sins of the world. Now, it’s our turn to make a move. If we

put our faith and trust in Jesus, then God's next move is salvation.

However, God will not make another step until we have made our move. If we choose to be passive, He will not do anything.

The Gospel is not the good news that you can have a new car, better house or financial success – even though God can help you with these things. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus has opened a way for us to receive eternal life.

The other side is that He has saved us from Hell, which is the judgment awaiting everyone who does not accept God's salvation offer.

The epistle to the Hebrews says that “...*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment...*” (Heb 9:27) . One day everyone will have to give an account for how they have lived their life – and none of us have lived up to God's standard. Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and that is why all of us need salvation – John 3:16 says that the world was perishing.

If our sins HAVE NOT been washed away, wrath is awaiting us on this judgment day. If our sins HAVE BEEN washed away, a reward is awaiting us.

Jesus came to save us from the wrath, so this day can be a day of reward instead.

...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

— 1. THESSALONIANS 1:9-10

The Thessalonians responded to the Gospel by turning away from their idols and starting to serve the living and true God. In other words, they believed the message and responded accordingly.

If someone has not received salvation, the wrath of God is awaiting him on the other side. Therefore John 3:36 is saying that “...*the wrath of God abides on him...*”. Our message is to warn people about this danger, and tell them the good news that Jesus has provided a way for us to be reconciled with God.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing

their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

— 2. CORINTHIANS 5:18-20

If people were already reconciled with God we would not need to implore them to do so. The Gospel is not a message that everything is ALREADY fine between you and God, but that everything CAN BE OK – depending upon how you respond to it.



# Some last words

My goal with the booklet is not to present God as an angry old man sitting on a white cloud, waiting to judge people. It is to highlight the danger of ONLY preaching God's love, without warning people about the reality of what is awaiting us after this life.

I do believe God loves sinners, but I also believe that the way our society understands love is different from the Bible's understanding. The fact that God loves sinners does not mean that everything will be OK when they die.

Since God's understanding of love is different from our society's understanding, we need to be careful and clear when we talk to unsaved people about the love of God – otherwise we might quickly end up giving them a false image of God.

Rather than preaching a message that will be popular in today's culture we should seek to preach the Gospel like they did in the Bible.

That does not mean it's wrong to use modern methods and illustrations – but the message needs to stay the same.

Instead of putting emphasis on subjects our culture will applaud, we should rather do it where the Bible does it – after all it is our ultimate authority.

I believe Christian groups get off track when they take ONE PART of the truth and make it THE WHOLE TRUTH – and this is slowly happening in much of modern preaching.



## How is God presented in the Bible?

Many will quickly say that the Bible presents God as love – and this is true. Love is without a doubt one of the character traits of God, but is it the one the Bible focuses on the most?

If you take a Bible dictionary and look up verses that describe God's nature you will find that there are other sides of God the Bible puts a lot more emphasis on.

However, much of the modern preaching gives you the impression that the Bible focuses 90% on God's love and maybe 10% on the other character traits.

In this little booklet Ronald Gabrielsen is addressing the danger of much of today's focus on love. Not because God is not loving, but because heresies often come from people making one part of the truth the whole truth.

Another issue is that our society's understanding of love is different from the Bible's understanding. And if you preach a message of love to a world that has a wrong understanding of love you will easily be misunderstood. Without knowing it you might end up giving people a false image of God.



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