

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the New King James Version.

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PREFACE

The materials contained in this study, with some editing, reflect the contents of ten sermons preached at the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids, MI, during the spring and summer of 1995. It is my hope and prayer that this study of the biblical materials regarding a popular theme of our day will be of much help to the people of God and others in forming their thinking according to the righteous and true mind of God, rather than according to the fancies of fallible and sinful men.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of unconditional love is one which regularly confronts us from all directions.

The **ungodly world** around us frequently talks about unconditional love. When the Hollywood movie, "Forest Gump" won an Oscar for best picture at the Academy Awards, one of its producers, Steve Tisch, was quoted as saying the following as he accepted the award:

. . . Forrest Gump isn't about politics or conservative values. It's about humanity, it's about respect, tolerance, and **unconditional love.**⁽¹⁾ (bold added)

The terminology of unconditional love can be traced to those involved in humanistic psychology and counselling. Martin and Deidre Bobgan write the following analysis as Christians questioning this perspective:

Self-Esteem is a high-lighted buzz word of need psychology, along with the words **unconditional love.**⁽²⁾ (bold added)

Later on, the Bobgans continue:

Among the stellar emotional needs of humanistic psychology are **unconditional acceptance** (by others), **unconditional self-regard**, **unconditional self-acceptance**, and **unconditional love**. The usual meaning of the word **unconditional** is 'without conditions or reservations; absolute.' The practical extension of the theories of unconditional love is a permissive attitude and a morally nonrestrictive atmosphere. That means no conditions or restrictions in child rearing, counseling, and other human relationships. . . Adler and Maslow (humanistic psychologists) considered these 'unconditionals' to be basic human needs, essential to a person's sense of well-being. They taught that people need to be loved and accepted unconditionally - without any conditions of performance. . .

Adler, Maslow, Rogers and others believed that a human being will find answers to his own dilemmas and naturally blossom into his best self in an atmosphere of unconditional love and acceptance, by which they meant a permissive, unstructured atmosphere. . .

The idea of people improving their life in an atmosphere of unconditional love is founded on the premise that people are born good and that their natural inclination to goodness is thwarted by their environment (mainly parents). In such a system, self is the victim of society but finds salvation, freedom, and fulfillment through unconditional self-love and self-acceptance. Unconditional love cannot be based upon performance or it wouldn't be unconditional. Therefore, it must be based on the intrinsic worth of the person. . .⁽³⁾

Now the well-instructed Christian immediately recognizes a number of serious errors in this teaching of the humanistic psychologists and others. For the humanists are purposefully ignoring the God of burning holiness who has declared that certain behavior is right and good, and certain behavior wrong and evil; and who in a judgmental and restrictive way demands that all men do what is right and good. Furthermore, because of man's fall into sin in the Garden, all men are not born good, but are inherently evil with a bad record and a bad heart from day one. Therefore, man's great need is not to be saved from the negative effects of his environment which inhibit his inherent goodness, or from an incorrectly bad self image. Man's greatest need is to be saved from the guilt and power and penalty of his sin which has alienated him from God and from others.

If it was only secular humanists who spoke of unconditional love, this study might be ended fairly quickly. However, psychologists who are professing Christians, and many other well-respected Christian leaders who reject many of the assumptions of the humanists have still continued to use their terminology of unconditional love. Men like Dr. James Dobson speak of man's need for unconditional love. They speak of God as the supreme example and source of such unconditional love. And they tell us that we should show this unconditional love to others around us.

Jerry Cook, an assistant pastor in a huge evangelical church in the state of Washington, has written the following in the book *Love, Acceptance & Forgiveness* which has 140,000 copies in print:

The minimal guarantee we must make to people is that they will be loved - always, under every circumstance, with no exception. The second guarantee is that they will be totally accepted, without reservation. . . . We need to extend this love to everyone who comes into our church . . .⁽⁴⁾

How do we respond to such sweeping pronouncements by Christians? As with any issue, the final word does not lie with the opinions of men, whether they be humanists or those who confess Jesus Christ. The final word is to be found in the Word of God. Thus in this study we will be seeking to carefully search God's Word in order to answer the question, "**What does God say about unconditional love?**" Is there such a thing? Does God love men this way? Are we to love others this way?

When we open our Bibles and study out all the uses of the major words for love, we discover that the answer to this question is not as simple as Pastor Cook's pronouncements might seem to make it. For the Bible confronts us with different degrees or dimensions of love - whether we speak of God's love for men, or of our love for others. Furthermore, when we take up the subject of **unconditional** love, it is crucial that we carefully define what is meant by the descriptive word, "unconditional", in light of the statements of the Word of God. Since the Scriptures clearly teach that God is love (1 John 4:8 & 16) and the God of love (2 Corinthians 13:11), our study will be structured overall according to the different dimensions of love which God shows to men. As we consider each of these dimensions of God's love, we will also seek to determine what our own duty is to our fellow men. **Does God then love men with an unconditional love?** The Bible answers that question - not with a "yes", or a "no". As with so many other issues, it answers it with both a "yes" **and** a "no". For the answer depends upon the dimension of God's love which is in view, and upon the way we define the word "unconditional". The Word of God confronts us with at least three different dimensions or degrees of God's love for men, and we will be focusing upon each one as we proceed. Consider then the first dimension of God's love for men:

PART ONE - GOD'S ELECTING OR CHOOSING LOVE

When most evangelical Christians talk about God's unconditional love, this aspect of His love could not be further from their minds, for many, if not most deny this aspect altogether. However, it is clearly taught in the Word of God. Please consider with me several elements of God's electing love. The first is:

ITS STRIKING REALITY.

Here I would direct you to Romans 9:10-13:

¹⁰And not, only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac ¹¹(for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹²it was said to her, *‘The older shall serve the younger.’* ¹³As it is written, *‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’*

The last verse of this passage speaks with particular forcefulness. The living God declares regarding two brothers that He loved one, Jacob, and hated one, Esau. And this word "hate" is the regular word for "hate".

Many Arminian brethren quickly try to dilute the forcefulness of these words by declaring that God here was talking about His temporal blessings upon Jacob as unfolded in the nation of Israel - temporal blessings in which Esau and his offspring did not share. However, although there is an element of truth in this explanation, it is not the whole truth. For these twin brothers are not used here to illustrate the difference in the earthly fortunes of two nations. They instead are used to illustrate the different eternal, spiritual fortunes of two groups of mankind.

Chapter nine begins with Paul expressing his great sorrow and unceasing grief for his unconverted fellow Israelites - so much so that he would be willing to be cursed himself eternally if they might be saved (verses 1-3). Next, after noting the great privileges of the physical descendants of Jacob, he grapples with the fact that not all these physical Jews have believed in their Messiah. Has God's Word failed to be fulfilled at this point? The Apostle Paul answers, "No", and then proceeds to show that it has always been true that not all of the physical descendants of the Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac were true Israelites with true hearts of faith in God

and therefore children of God's promises. At this point we are confronted with the illustration of Jacob and Esau in the verses upon which we are focusing. And then Paul elaborates, concluding in verse 18, "Therefore He (God) has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens". The subject in view is that of God's showing mercy in the salvation of some, and God's hardening of others who are reprobates. And if there was yet any question, consider Paul's words in verses 22-24:

²²What if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴*even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Thus, from the surrounding context, it is clear that in the example of Jacob and Esau, God through His inspired penman Paul was declaring that He had chosen to love Jacob which resulted in Jacob's salvation, while He had chosen to hate Esau resulting in his eternal destruction. There is no other way to understand the obvious meaning of the text before us. Therefore, I have declared that this passage presents to us God's **electing** or **choosing** love. This love is a love which God chooses to show to only certain people, and which He chooses not to show to others.

At this point the humanists and many Christian promoters of unconditional love generally react in a strongly negative way. For a crucial element of their concept of unconditional love is that it is to be shown **to everyone**, no matter who they are or what they do. They have no room for a God who only chooses to love certain people and hates others. "How unfair!," they protest. "It's exactly such archaic, Calvinistic notions from which we need to be delivered." However, there is a "little" problem, for these truths are found in God's Word. Early on we are forced to decide what will be the final court of appeal in the matter of unconditional love - our own notions or "Thus saith the Lord". If we fear God, we do not have the option of throwing out "Thus saith the Lord" just because it doesn't seem to fit with our preconceived notions. It also should be kept in mind that there are at least two further dimensions of the love of God in addition to His electing love which remain to be considered later in this study. In other words, we have not yet considered the entire picture.

Having noted the striking reality of God's electing or choosing love, we come to a second element:

ITS PRE-CREATIONAL TIMING.

When men speak of the notion of unconditional love, they generally have in view love which is being directed toward individuals who can be seen - who are presently living on the earth. However, the electing love of God was first formed and focused upon its recipients much earlier than their lifetimes upon earth. According to verses 11 through 13 of Romans 9, God set His choosing love upon Jacob before he was even born. In fact, in Ephesians 1:4 we are told that God has chosen those of us who are true Christians in Christ **"before the foundation of the world"**. Before we were even in existence - before we were conceived in our mother's womb - in fact, before the world even existed, the sovereign God chose to love certain members of the human race who would exist and be born in the future, and to hate the rest, as far as their eternal salvation was concerned. This was all determined far in advance.

All of this raises a further question, which brings us to a third element of God's choosing love:

ITS SPECIFIC CRITERION.

Back in eternity past, the sovereign God loved certain individuals who would in the future be born, and He did not love others. On what basis did He make His decision? On what basis did He choose some for salvation from their sin, and determine to allow others to pass on into eternal destruction still in their sin? When I was a college student and first heard real Calvinists talking with each other about the sovereignty of God over the salvation of men, I foolishly broke into the conversation, thinking that I knew all the answers regarding this issue. I argued as follows: Since God is God, He knows all things. Therefore, He knew ahead of time who it was who would believe in him, and who would not. And thus He looked down the corridors of time and chose to set His love upon those whom He foresaw would of their own free will believe in Him.

This is probably the answer that would be given by most of those Christians who earnestly promote the concept of unconditional love today. And here is a great irony. For such a response is to teach that God's electing or choosing love is **conditional love**, not unconditional love. God's love according to this explanation **is**

conditioned upon the behavior of the individual. It is conditioned upon what God sees the individual will do with the Gospel of Christ in the future. Those whom He sees will believe are those whom He loves.

However, we still must ask if this answer to God's basis or criterion for His electing love is the Bible's answer. What is it that Paul says in Romans 9:11 & 16?

¹¹. . . (for *the children* not yet being born, **nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.** . . .

¹⁶So then **it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.**

It is my conviction that it is impossible to understand these verses in a way that conditions God's electing love upon what man will do in the future. To do so would be to cancel out the whole point Paul is trying to make. Paul here is declaring that men have nothing to do with God's election to eternal life or God's reprobation to eternal destruction. Man's will or man's actions have nothing to do with it. It is entirely a matter of God's will or purpose. In other words, as far as man's character or deeds are concerned, **God's electing love is truly unconditional towards those whom He chooses.**

At this point I would refer to an illustration of choosing up sides to play a basketball or soccer game. Most of us are generally pretty competitive in such matters. Although we may try to choose a few poorer players earlier so that they will not feel badly about being chosen last, we generally try to choose the best players available for our team. But when the Lord chose those to be in His army, the characteristics of those he selected had nothing to do with His selection of them. There **is** such a thing as unconditional love, rightly defined and understood. However, this type of unconditional love is not exactly what the proponents of this terminology normally mean in our day. In fact, many professing Christians will react at this point, "Unfair! It's not fair that God should on His own determine who will be saved and who will not. If this is true, why doesn't He save everybody? And how can He hold anyone responsible for continuing in their sins and send them to hell?" The Apostle Paul anticipated such objections. He raised and dealt with the question of God's righteousness or fairness in electing only some in Romans 9:14-15 where we read:

¹⁴What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, *'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.'*

In essence, Paul said, the issue here is not one of fairness or righteousness, but of mercy, for if we all received what was fair and just we all would be burning in hell. It is the mercy of God alone which causes Him to choose to save anyone. But then Paul went on in Romans 9:19-21 to deal further with the issue of how an electing God can hold anyone responsible for continuing in their sins:

¹⁹You will say to me then, *'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'* ²⁰But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, *'Why have you made me like this?'* ²¹Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

If we might paraphrase Paul's response, he was in essence declaring, "Who do you think you are? God made you and He has a right to do with you as He sees fit. End of discussion." And if it was wrong in Paul's day to persist in asking such questions, it is still wrong in our day. There are simply some things God has not chosen to tell us - and He is under no obligation to do so. Furthermore, He probably does not tell us because our puny minds would be unable to understand. For He is infinite and we are finite.

In conclusion then, we see that God chooses to love and save certain individuals without conditioning that love upon their behavior or character before their salvation. The only basis for His choice is His own good and perfect will. However, the fact that God's electing love is unconditional with regard to the deeds and character of men before they are saved does not mean that He is unconcerned with the character or deeds of those He chooses. This brings us to a further element of God's electing love:

ITS MORAL PURPOSE.

The unconditional love of the humanist psychologist would acceptingly and permissively let a person go on living however he jolly well-pleased, no matter how wicked the behavior might be. But this is not the

unconditional electing love of God. For God's electing love has a definite and moral purpose attached to it. Notice verses 28 & 29 of the preceding chapter, Romans chapter 8:

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

By way of **introduction**, when we come to verse 29, our Arminian brethren are quick to point out that it was those whom God foreknew that he predestined to be saved. If we were interacting with them as we turned to this verse, we might hear them saying, "There it is! God chose those whom He saw ahead of time would believe the Gospel." However, there are at least three problems with that understanding:

a. It is true that the living God knows everything that will take place in advance. However, even if this is what is meant by the word "**foreknow**" here, the verse does not tell us what aspects of what God saw happening in advance were the basis for God's predestination. So this understanding of "**foreknow**" proves nothing definitively. But there is clear indication that this is not the primary meaning of "foreknow" in the passage before us, which brings us to the second problem with the Arminian explanation:

b. The verse does not say that God foreknew things or facts or even actions. It says that He foreknew people. Such usage highlights the fact that the Bible speaks of a special knowing of a person which is a knowledge of love and intimate relationship. And this is evidently what is in view in verse 29. Those whom God ahead of time specially set His love upon are those whom He predestined to be saved.

c. A third problem with the Arminian explanation of foreknowledge in verse 29 is that it directly contradicts Paul's clear declaration one chapter later in chapter nine that God's choosing love was not based in any way upon the will or deeds of men. Since the God of truth cannot contradict Himself in His Word, we should not adopt an interpretation of one passage of God's Word which directly contradicts another, especially when the other text is in such close proximity, and when there is a satisfactory alternative understanding of the text in question.

With this matter of introduction behind us, notice what God's choosing love and predestination had as its focus or goal. God predestined men "to be conformed to the image of His Son". The God of burning holiness may have initially chosen His people irrespective of what they would do in the future as unconverted men and women and children, but He was not content to leave them in their sin and wickedness and resulting eternal ruin. The whole point and purpose of His electing love was to make His chosen ones holy - individuals whose lives are conformed to the image and example of the perfect Son of God.

This moral purpose behind God's electing love is underscored in two other passages of God's Word in the book of Ephesians:

³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him** in love, (1:3-4)

For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**" (2:10)

If we return to the illustration of choosing sides for a soccer or basketball game, when it comes to God's choices for those on His side (if we may speak this way), no one is able to play. Instead, the One doing the choosing will make them into players.

In summary, the sovereign God was not willing to leave elect hell-bound sinners to themselves to work out their own goodness in the manner promoted by the humanistic psychologists. It was impossible for them to do so. Rather, when the holy God placed His electing love upon sinners, He did it with the explicit purpose of making them holy and saving their souls. He did it to meet the greatest needs of their hearts. Behold the amazing love of God! But the Word of God provides us with further reasons for glorying in the electing love of God. For the Lord not only had good intentions. He also certainly carried out, and is still carrying out what He purposed to do.

Having seen the moral purpose of God's electing love, notice next:

ITS MAJOR MANIFESTATIONS.

For those of us who know the Lord, there have been two major ways in which He has lavishly displayed His electing love before our eyes in time and space. And the first is:

1. **Its crowning display.** Consider Romans 5:5-10 (especially verse 8):

⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. ⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

When Paul in verse 5 speaks of the love of God having been poured out within our hearts, he is referring to God's love to man (not man's love for Him). For he next lays out in verses 6 to 8 a striking demonstration of God's love for men. It is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. If we would see God's love for mankind, we should look at the pierced Son of God hanging on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem. However, I have declared that in this passage **the cross is not held up as a demonstration of God's love for mankind in general, but rather of God's electing love in particular.** Upon what basis do I say that? Notice three reasons from the text before us:

- a. Because of the identification here of those for whom Christ died. According to verse 8, Paul was not speaking of God's love for every man on the earth. He was instead very personal and very specific. As one believer writing to other believers in Christ he wrote, "But God demonstrates His own love toward **us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for **us**." Paul had in view here especially the children of God as those for whom Christ died.
- b. Because of the description of what Christ did for those for whom He died. According to the typical evangelical of our day, the end result of Christ's death on the cross was that He made it possible for every person on earth to be saved if they would only by their almighty free wills choose Christ. However, according to verse 10, Christ's death was much more definite than this in its accomplishment. It says that "we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son". Christ's death on behalf of a specific group of people was effective. It actually accomplished something for them. Thus it was a display of the electing love of God.
- c. Because of the description of the character of those for whom Christ died. **That which particularly demonstrated the love of God the Father according to this passage was the fact that when Jesus Christ died on that cross for Paul and those believers to whom he originally wrote, they (and we) were weak and helpless and ungodly (verse 6), were yet sinners (verse 8), and therefore, were the enemies of God (verse 10).** Notice, Paul here wrote, not to Old Testament saints who were already converted and justified by faith at the time of Jesus' death. He wrote to Roman Christians, and included himself among them as those who had been wicked, ungodly, wretched sinners at the time of Christ's death. For such as them, Jesus had died. In other words, there was nothing in these rebels for whom Christ died which would have called forth this love of God the Father for them. It was the unconditional, electing love of God which was at work at the cross. Here we see its crowning display.

However, the death of Christ on the cross for wicked men while they were still wicked men is not the only display of the electing love of God. For if God had stopped here, we would still be personally left in our sin and wretchedness. Thus we must note a further display of God's electing love which is:

2. **Its personal experience.** Observe the contents of Ephesians 2:1-5:

¹And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. **⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved),

We who know the Lord were from the day of our birth spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. We could do nothing to raise ourselves from the dead. There was nothing in us that contributed to our salvation. Yet, at the time of our total helplessness and hopelessness, the merciful and sovereign and all-powerful God acted in love. He made us alive spiritually with Christ. He raised us to a new life so that we hated and repented of our sins, and loved and believed in His Son. He acted - not as a response to anything good or commendable in us. Behold this amazing display of the unconditional, electing love of God to poor, dead sinners. Here it is displayed in our own personal experience, as the work which Christ accomplished on the cross is worked out in individual lives. And it will continue to be worked out until it is completed at Christ's return.

With these manifestations of the electing love of God before us, notice briefly a further element of this dimension of God's love for men:

ITS CERTAIN PERPETUITY.

Here I would direct your attention to Romans 8:31-39:

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written: *For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.* ³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. **³⁸For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

In this passage God's sovereign purposes to save a particular group of elect sinners is clearly front and center. Verse 31 tells us that these verses are a response to what has just been said, and the immediately preceding verses (28-30) were focused upon the sovereign plan of God to save a specific, chosen people. Then God's election is specifically underscored again by a reference to the elect in verse 33. So when this passage refers to the love of Christ (verse 35) and the love of God (verse 39), it is clearly the electing love of God which is in view.

What is it which this text emphasizes regarding the electing love of God? That the elect believer who loves God can in no way be separated from it. For all eternity, God's electing love will continue to be directed toward His elect children, and nothing can stop it.

Consider in closing one final matter related to the electing love of God:

ITS VITAL LESSONS.

We have sought to outline the features of God's electing love from the Scriptures, and are now ready to consider some final applications. First off all consider several lessons which apply:

1. To those who are not true Christians:

a. When we come to the subject of the electing love of God along with that of His reprobation, it is vital to remember that at this point we are talking about the eternal purposes of God which are not fully revealed to men. This means, dear unbeliever, that you do not know who the elect or reprobate are among those who are presently unconverted; and therefore, you do not know into which category you fall personally. For you are not sovereign and all knowing. Only God is. The secret things belong to Him. But the revealed things belong to you which brings us to the next application:

b. This truth of the electing, choosing love of God stands as a warning to you. Do not put your hope or confidence in your own supposed good works or heart desires or any other device of man. God does not choose to eternally love men on that basis. It is all the grace of God. Furthermore, God does not need you. He is not dependent upon you in any way, as if He were in heaven wringing his hands waiting upon you to make your almighty decision for Him. He reigns in the heavens and does whatsoever He chooses. He doesn't need you. You rather need Him if you would ever be saved. Therefore, look to Him and be saved. Your only hope as a dead sinner is the Lord.

c. But there is also a word of great hope and encouragement to you, my lost friend. If you are one of God's elect, your salvation has nothing to do with who you are or what you have experienced or done. Thus there is hope that you too may be saved, no matter how your sins may bind you presently, and no matter how wicked you have been or are. God's Word calls you to flee to Christ and make Him the eternal refuge for your soul. If you do so, you will then know that you are one of His elect, for it was He who enabled you to go. But you don't know that ahead of time. All you know is that you are commanded to flee the wrath to come into the arms of a Christ who will gladly receive each repenting sinner.

However, there are also some lessons from what we have seen which have special application:

2. To Christians:

a. We cannot directly imitate God's electing love in our dealings with others because we are not sovereign like God. We do not choose who will be saved and who will not. We cannot send or be a Savior who is punished for the sins of the elect. That has already been done. And we do not do the sovereign work in the hearts of men by which spiritually dead individuals are raised to new spiritual life in Christ. Thus in a real sense this form of God's love cannot be imitated directly by us.

b. However, the Word of God indicates that in a more indirect way we are obligated to echo or reflect the electing love of God (like the echo of a sonar signal through sea water, or the reflection of the sun's light by the moon) in our relations with others around us. Observe two ways in which this is true:

(1) First of all, consider Romans 14:14-15:

¹⁴I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. ¹⁵Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, **you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.**

Although it is true that we do not know who the elect are among those who are presently not Christians, we have every reason to believe that every Christian with a credible profession is one of God's elect for whom Christ died. That is Paul's assumption here. Therefore, one reason why we should love all our brothers and sisters in Christ is that the Father has loved them with His eternal, electing love as manifested by Christ's death for them.

Furthermore, this passage indicates that we should love all our brethren in Christ in a way which seeks their true, eternal good, instead of their destruction. And we should persist in this edifying, helpful love toward our brethren **in an unconditional way** as far as their present conduct is concerned, as long as there is good reason to believe they are true Christians and therefore objects of God's unconditional, electing love. Observe that the weaker brothers toward whom these "stronger" Roman Christians were to continue to show patient and self-denying love were indeed weak. They had truly messed-up, erroneous notions regarding Christian liberty, and therefore they had messed-up consciences (Romans 14:14). These weaker brethren evidently were at times trying to wrongly judge and bind the consciences of their stronger brethren (Romans 14:3b). Yet the stronger brethren were to persist in unconditionally seeking the good of their weaker brethren. Why? So that they might properly imitate the unconditional, electing love of God which sent Christ to die for his people while they were

still ungodly, and which, we might add, persists in doing good to God's children following their conversions even though they often sin against the Lord. We are thus called to likewise unconditionally love all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

If all Christians are to so respond to their Christian brethren, in perhaps an even more pointed way, pastors are under obligation to manifest the unconditional, electing love of God and of Christ toward the sheep for whom they care. Observe the heart response of the Apostle Paul to brethren who rejected his God-ordained leadership over and pastoral care for them:

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. (2 Corinthians 12:15)

Paul with unconditional love persisted in sacrificially seeking to do good to the saints under his care, even though increased expressions of love were met with increased resistance and cold shoulders. This is the response which the Chief Shepherd demands of those who represent Him as undershepherds in the church. Pastors must especially imitate the unconditional, electing love of Christ toward the saints - even when it is hardest to do. Truly only the grace of God can enable them to so imitate Christ, but do so they must, never forgetting the sacrifices of their great Pattern and Lord and Savior.

But there is also a broader application of the electing love of God to our dealings with our fellow men:

(2) Since we do not know who the elect and the reprobate are in the mass of unconverted humanity around us, and will not fully know until the final day of judgment, we are called to treat all men with a real measure of kindness and love, since some of them are God's elect who have not yet been made manifest through conversion and glorification. We do not know but what that vile man at work is one of God's elect. Possibly that wicked woman down the street is one who will come to know the Lord. Therefore, we should be kind to them and show love to them in general. However, we especially should show love to all around us by seeking to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them to the extent possible. None should be excluded. And we should do so with real hopefulness. For it doesn't matter how wicked a man or woman may be. It is not their original character which determines whether or not God will save them. God often chooses to save the most vile of individuals. Thus we should lovingly seek the salvation of all men no matter what their color, lifestyle, background or personality. (At this point Pastor Cook who was mentioned earlier is right.) In so responding we reflect at least a shadow of the electing love of God.

There is one final category of application for Christians:

c. God's unconditional, electing love to us also calls us to several responses toward the God who has so loved us:

(1) It should melt our hearts with wonder and amazement and humility and encouragement. It had nothing to do with who we were or what we did. It was all the amazing, unmerited grace of God which according to His own will chose to so break into our lives and save us.

(2) It should fill our hearts with gratitude for such free grace from God's hands to helpless, hell-bound sinners like ourselves. We certainly needed the electing love of God and He has given it to us.

(3) It should give us great hope and confidence as we look to the future, for it will never end.

Let me close this section by reminding you of the words of a hymn by John Newton:

One there is, above all others, well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's, costly, free, and knows no end:
They who once his kindness prove find it everlasting love.
Which of all our friends, to save us, could or would have shed his blood?
But our Jesus died to have us reconciled in him to God.
This was boundless love indeed; Jesus is a Friend in need.
When he lived on earth abased, "Friend of sinners" was his name;
Now above all glory raised, he rejoices in the same;
Still he call them brethren, friends, and to all their wants attends.

Could we bear from one another what he daily bears from us?
 Yet this glorious Friend and Brother loves us though we treat him thus:
 Though for good we render ill, he accounts us brethren still.
 O for grace our hearts to soften! Teach us, Lord, at length to love;
 We, alas! forget too often what a Friend we have above:
 But when home our souls are brought, we will love thee as we ought.⁽⁵⁾

Having now sought to understand the first dimension of God's love for men and its application to our lives, we are ready to take up a second dimension:

PART TWO - GOD'S COMMON OR GENERAL LOVE

Notice with me several elements of this dimension of God's love which are laid out for us in the Word of God. First of all observe:

ITS DEFINITE REALITY.

Does the Bible teach that God has a common or general love toward all men? Yes it does. There are a number of passages which indicate this, but let me refer you to the two texts which are clearest in this regard. First of all, consider Matthew 5:43-8:

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, "*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*" ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.'

The Lord Jesus here commanded His disciples to reject the false teaching of the Jewish leaders which declared that one should love their neighbor but hate their enemy. Instead, they were to love their enemies as well as their friends, and to pray (literally) "in behalf of" those who persecute and mistreat them. Then He explained why it was so important to do that which is natively so hard to do.

We are to seek the good of such wicked men in practical, definite ways in order that we may show family likeness to our heavenly Father. If we say we are His sons, then we should show it by being like God in our behavior and moral character. And how is God toward His enemies? Verse 45 indicates that He causes His sun to rise on the evil as well as the good each morning, and that rain is sent on the ground of the unrighteous as well as on that of the righteous. We are to love our wicked enemies because God our Father loves His wicked enemies as well as His friends. Here is a description of the common or general love of God - a love extended to every person living on earth.

But observe a second passage which confirms this - Luke 6:27-36 (especially note verses 35-6):

²⁷ But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. ³¹And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. ³²But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵**But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.** ³⁶**Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.'**

Once again, the Lord Jesus spoke amazing words to disciples who along with their Lord faced the venomous hatred and persecution of wicked men. He commanded them to love their enemies and do good to them - even

lending to them expecting nothing in return. Why? In addition to receiving a great reward from God the Father, they also would once again be showing themselves to be His sons by the similarity between their treatment of their enemies and God's treatment of His enemies. For He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Thus they were to be merciful as their father is merciful.

In conclusion, these two key passages clearly teach that God shows a common or general love to all men living on earth by doing good to them, whether they are godly or ungodly individuals. And thus this second dimension of God's love is similar to the first dimension (God's electing love) in that **it is unconditional love**. In a real sense it is a love not conditioned or restricted by the behavior and character of those to whom it is directed. But this general love is different from God's electing love, for it is directed to **all** men on earth, whether or not they are the objects of God's choosing, electing love. Having established the definite reality of God's common or general love for all men, observe secondly:

ITS DETAILED DESCRIPTION.

What is this general love of God for man like? How is it described in the Word of God? Notice three important aspects of this dimension of God's love. First:

1. **It is genuinely felt.** There are some, especially hyper-Calvinists, who have a difficult time believing that God could ever truly love anyone other than the elect. In their view it is a logical contradiction to ever view the sovereign, holy God who has chosen to eternally hate the reprobate as in any way truly loving those same reprobate sinners and seeking their good. Therefore, the hyper-Calvinist tries to avoid the force of passages like Matthew 5 and Luke 6. One way in which he attempts to do this is by saying that God, by the good things He does to the reprobate, is actually seeking to make hotter the fires of hell for these individuals since they will despise and refuse to respond aright to God's good gifts. Thus, according to their explanation, God does not really show love at all to the reprobate.

Others might not be willing to go this far, but seek to explain God's good gifts to non-elect sinners in a different way. They point out that there has to be a stable world order, and the full fruits of sin have to be restrained if the Gospel and Christ's Kingdom are to advance in the earth over a lengthy period of centuries and millennia. Thus the good things that God does for reprobate men are really done, not for their benefit, but for the ultimate benefit of His elect and His Kingdom.

How should we respond to such perspectives? It is true that the rejection of God's good gifts will lead to a more severe judgement. Christ said that to whom much is given, much will be required. Furthermore, it is true that God is working all things ultimately to the glory of His name and the advance of His Kingdom on the earth. However, this is not the whole truth. It clearly is not the explanation given for the good things God does for wicked men in Luke 6 and elsewhere. Notice once again Luke 6:35-36. We find two key words here - "**kind**" in verse 35, and "**merciful**" in verse 36. This passage says that God is kind to unthankful and evil men, and is merciful to such. At this point let me briefly summarize a helpful study of what these words mean by Pastor Greg Nichols.⁽⁶⁾

The word translated "**kind**" here, elsewhere in the New Testament has the sense of being tenderhearted as opposed to having a hard-hearted, grudging spirit; of being easy as opposed to responding with harshness and oppressiveness; of approachability as opposed to being cold and unsympathetic; and of generosity. Such language hardly sounds like a Divine sadistic delight in heaping up future misery for wicked men, nor like a mere using of them for other purposes.

The word translated "**merciful**" here, elsewhere in the New Testament includes at least three dimensions:

- It implies sensitivity to or awareness of need;
- It implies sympathy with that need; and
- It implies a sincere effort to meet that need.

In other words, even toward His enemies, the living God is thoughtful regarding their needs, is sensitive to them, and takes concrete steps to meet those needs.

God's heart of genuinely felt love for even His wicked enemies is underscored even more broadly in Psalm 145:8-9:

⁸The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,
 Slow to anger and great in mercy.
⁹The LORD is good to all,
 And His tender mercies are over all His works.

There is no area of the realm of living beings which God has made which does not feel the throbbing heart of God's love for it. He is gracious and merciful and slow to anger and great in lovingkindness to all He has made - including even His enemies - even the reprobate who will never be saved from their sins.

Now at this point the hyper-Calvinist has a hard time. How can a God who has eternally set His hatred toward men at the same time truly love them and be kindly and favorably disposed toward them? Listen to Berkhof's helpful response:

In speaking on this subject we ought to be very careful and allow ourselves to be guided by the explicit statements of Scripture rather than by our bold inferences from the secret counsel of God. There is far more in God than we can reduce to our logical categories. Are the elect in this life the objects of God's love only, and never in any sense the objects of His wrath? . . . does not Paul say to the Ephesians that they `were by nature children of wrath even as the rest'? Eph. 2:3. Evidently the elect can not be regarded as *always* and *exclusively* the objects of God's love. And if they who are the objects of God's redeeming love can also in some sense of the word be regarded as the objects of His wrath, why should it be impossible that they who are the objects of His wrath should also in some sense share His divine favor? . . . General Washington hated the traitor that was brought before him and condemned him to death, but at the same time showed him compassion by serving him with the dainties from his own table. Cannot God have compassion even on the condemned sinner, and bestow favors upon him?⁽⁷⁾

Thus God's common or general love is genuinely-felt love by God, even toward His enemies.

But more briefly, notice a second aspect of the Bible's detailed description of God's general love:

2. It is creationally-inspired. We might still ask, why does God show such mercy and kindness to even His wicked enemies? Granted, it is because of who God is - because of His attributes which include mercy and love as well as justice and holiness. But there is more. Psalm 145:9 points us in the right direction when it declares that ". . . His tender mercies are over all **His works**."

When the living God loves His enemies, He is after all loving His own handiwork. When He first made this world and all living creatures on it including man, He made it very good. Man was the climax of His creation, for God made him to be His own image - His own likeness - upon the earth. Although the Fall of man into sin has marred God's handiwork and brought a curse upon the earth; and although the image of God seen in lost men is now perverted and twisted, man and the rest of the creatures have not ceased to be God's handiwork, nor has even wicked man totally ceased to be God's image bearer. The glory of God is still revealed through His handiwork (Psalm 19), and thus He has not rejected or abandoned it. In fact, He has committed Himself to redeem it, and remake it into the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Furthermore, even before the Fall of man into sin, the Lord had made man and the rest of the creatures to be finite or limited, and weak and dependent upon God for their sustenance and continued life. With man's fall into sin, the dangers and needs of men and the animals increased to a much higher level than before, so that the preserving and caring hand of God was more necessary than ever if life was to continue on the earth. Therefore, because even wicked men are the handiwork of God (although perverted and twisted), and since they and all living creatures on earth are desperately and totally dependent upon the living God if they are not to wipe themselves and be wiped off the face of the earth, the heart of a merciful and kind, creating God has responded in this world with love to even His enemies. His general love is creationally-inspired. It is directed toward the dependent creation of His own hands.

But also, God's common love is:

3. Covenantally-expressed. The general love of God for all men has caused Him to commit Himself to care for

them in this life by a covenant or oath-sworn promise. This covenant is called the Noahic Covenant. We will focus upon the passage of God's Word where this covenant is recorded in the next section. But at this point it should be noted that God's common love is not a light or unimportant matter with God. He established an entire covenant with men and the animals upon the earth as an expression of His serious commitment to love and provide for those He has created, even though His creation has been polluted by sin.

his then is the Bible's detailed description of God's general or common love. It is genuinely-felt, creationally-inspired, and covenantally-expressed. But now, we must hasten on to consider:

ITS MULTIPLIED MANIFESTATIONS.

How does the God of general love express His love to wicked and righteous men alike? As we seek to outline the multiplied manifestations of the common love of God, I would simply remind you that there is a term which we use to refer to all of those manifestations combined. It is the term "**common grace**". God's common grace is **the totality of those blessings and favors which He out of His general love shows to this undeserving and sin-cursed world - short of the greatest blessing of salvation.**

Now notice the words of the Noahic covenant in Genesis 8:20 to 9:11 where we find the foundational manifestations of God's common love for our present age:

^{8:20}Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, `I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

²²While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
And cold and heat,
And winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease.'

^{9:1}So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: `Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ²And the fear of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. ³Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. ⁴But you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood. ⁵Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a *reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

⁶Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God
He made man.

⁷And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;
Bring forth abundantly in the earth
And multiply in it.'

⁸Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: ⁹`And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that *is* with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. ¹¹Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

The entire world of breathing creatures including mankind had just been destroyed by a universal flood except those who had been in the ark. The survivors probably wondered how long it would be until such a richly-deserved judgment came again (verse 21b) - perhaps this time wiping out all the inhabitants of the earth. Thus the Lord mercifully made several provisions for the good of those inhabitants as part of His covenant promises. (I am again at this point indebted to the material from Pastor Greg Nichols mentioned earlier. ⁽⁸⁾) There was first of all:

1. **The perpetuation of life in society.** According to 9:1 & 7, the Lord commanded Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The Lord was providing for the continuation of living creatures on the earth, and in the process He upheld the institution of the family.
2. **The restraint of the curse.** According to verse 2, the fear of man would be placed upon all the non-human creatures on earth so that man would be protected from the ravages of the curse in them. In this one example we are pointed to the many ways in which the Lord continually restrains the curse upon the earth so that it is not as bad in its effects as it could be.
3. **Provision for the sustenance of life.** Verses 3 and 4 speak of God's expanded provisions of food for man so that he might have his needs met and continue to survive on the earth. The key texts in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 which we noted earlier likewise have this matter for their main focus. They speak of God's love to the wicked and godly alike in providing the sun and rain needed for the growing and production of food in a world in which such labors are hampered by weeds and thorns.
4. **The restraint of sin itself.** In verses 9:5-6, we find the Lord commanding severe punishment for the serious sin of murder, thereby providing for the restraining of sin in society. In this command there were the seeds of later civil governments which would be, according to Romans 13:1-4, given by God to punish evildoers and reward those who do good. We might add that according to Romans 2:14-15, the Lord has from creation given men a functioning conscience which tells him what is right and wrong - another manifestation of the common love of God in restraining sin.
5. **The forestalling or postponement of ultimate judgment.** Both Genesis 8:21-22 and 9:11 indicate that a universal judgment by God through a world-wide flood would not occur again as long as the earth remained. God was promising that the ultimate judgement which the world so richly deserved for her sins would be delayed for awhile because of the patience of God so that there would be space for repentance. Thus, to this day, in the language of Romans 9:22, God endures ". . . with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction".

These then are manifestations of the general love of God in common grace which are directly associated with the Noahic Covenant. But there are a few more manifestations which should be mentioned which are more closely associated with later redemptive covenants between God and man:

6. **The general, positive effects of the Gospel in a region or land where it has been proclaimed and where a number of its citizens have been converted.** Generally, such a land knows much prosperity, as our own land has.
7. **The more particular benefits of being directly exposed to the life and ministry of the church of Christ, so that, although not a Christian, one may be spoken of as having been "once enlightened", having "tasted the heavenly gift", "become partakers of the Holy Spirit", and "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come"** (Hebrews 6:4-5).
8. Even more specifically, **having received the sincere, free offer of the Gospel.** When our Lord said that many are called but few chosen (Matthew 20:16b), He was referring to His universal call to all men to believe the good news of Jesus Christ. Many who are not saved, receive that call nonetheless. And it is a revelation of the general good will and love of the living God for men, for the Word of God clearly indicates that He does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32). Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, wept over the hardheartedness and rebellion and rejection of a Jerusalem which He desired to gather under his wings as a hen gathers her chicks (Matthew 23:27; Luke 19:41). The Lord sincerely calls many to Himself through faithful preachers and through the reading of His Word which has mercifully been made available to us in our own language. And those calls reveal the true love of God for wicked men which genuinely desires that all men be saved.

How all these common grace benefits of God toward all His created order including mankind agree with a sovereign God who has before the foundation of the world loved some men and hated others, I do not profess to know. There are apparent tensions and profound mysteries here. But the Word of God teaches this general, common love to all men nonetheless.

Having seen the manifestations of the general love of God, notice in the fourth place:

ITS SOBERING LIMITS.

The general love of God is amazing, wonderful, and broad - especially when we remember that it is daily and hourly shown in multiplied ways to ungrateful, wicked men who are the enemies of God. And yet, it is not a love without boundaries or limits, especially when it comes to those who never repent and believe the Gospel. There are two limits which should briefly gain our attention, the second flowing from the first. First of all, God's general love toward the wicked is limited:

1. **In degree.** It is a lesser level of love, a love which is smaller in degree, than that which is the highest level of love which God has for men. On what basis do I say this? For at least two reasons:

a. First of all, **it is lesser in degree as to its benefits.** Since the general love of Matthew 5 and Luke 6 is shown to both wicked and righteous alike, and since many of the wicked are never saved from their sins, and ultimately perish, this is a love which falls short of the electing, redeeming love of God which does save to the uttermost those upon whom it is bestowed.

b. But secondly, God's general love is **lesser in the degree to which it reflects the whole heart of God toward men.** It is true that the Lord loves wicked men on earth with a general love of kindness. But that is not all which is found in His heart toward those wicked men who never repent. We saw earlier that God has also hated reprobate sinners since before they were born. Furthermore, even while wicked men live their wicked lives upon the earth, Psalm 5:4-6 describes for us the response of God's heart to them:

⁴For You *are* not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,

Nor shall evil dwell with You.

⁵The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;

You hate all workers of iniquity.

⁶You shall destroy those who speak falsehood;

The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

So while the Lord genuinely and seriously loves lost sinners with an unconditional, general love of kindness, He at the same time hates them with a perfect, holy hatred. He cannot be whole-hearted in His love toward them. His own character will not allow Him to do so.

However, God's common love is not only limited in degree while it is being shown to lost sinners. It is also limited:

2. **In duration.** The awful reality is that, for sinners who pass from this life impenitent, the wrath and hatred and revulsion of God persist and explode into all eternity, while the general love of God comes to a screeching halt when life on this present earth ends. Once their eternal spiritual state has been fixed at death, lost sinners become totally hardened in their wickedness, and no longer experience the common grace and love of God. In other words, **on the threshold of eternity, God's unconditional, general love ceases to be unconditional as far as the character of its recipients is concerned.** It continues only for those who are the righteous after that point as it is swallowed up as it were into the greater glory and breadth of the redeeming love of God.

Now the humanist who is living only for this present life, and whose concept of unconditional love only applies to his days upon this earth, may be unconcerned with the limited duration of God's unconditional, general love. But he **should** be concerned, and so should you. A few short days on earth enjoying the general love and undeserved favor of God shrivel into insignificance compared to the yawning, endless gulf of an eternity alienated and separated from the God of common love in eternal torments. For to be completely and eternally separated from the God of general love is to be completely and eternally separated from the general love of God.

In conclusion, although the general love of God for all men is a wonderful thing, and although it is unconditional while men live upon the earth, we again are forced to realize that it does not mean that God is unconcerned with, or indifferent to, or permissive regarding the conduct and character of those whom He so loves.

Remember that a key expression of His general love is the sincere offer of a Gospel of **repentance and turning from one's present ungodly lifestyle.** The reality is that if men - if you - insist on living an ungodly life and ignoring the gracious offers and demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you will never know the full riches of

God's love beyond the more limited degree of his unconditional, general love of kindness. And even the common love of God which you presently do know will ultimately and eternally end because of your wickedness.

Before we end the study of this second dimension of God's love for men, there is one final matter regarding the general love of God, that of:

ITS HUMAN APPLICATION.

Here I would focus first of all upon:

1. The most obvious lesson flowing from our major texts in Matthew 5 and Luke 6. In our study of the electing love of God, we wrestled with the fact that there did not seem to be a direct application of that dimension of God's love to how we should love others, although there were indirect indications. However, we are left with no question regarding the applicability of God's common love to how we love others.

The key texts for God's general love declare that if we claim to be Christians with God as our Father, **we should show that we are His children and offspring by loving even our enemies with a general love, even as He does.** We are to show unconditional love to all men by being kind and merciful to them no matter who they are.

Whether they are the most vile of men, or the godliest saint, we are to show genuine kindness to them and concern for them. We are to be merciful to them even as God is. The Bible does call us to show unconditional love toward all men - even our enemies. Drawing from our key texts, this means more specifically that we will respond toward our enemies in the following ways:

- a. We will greet them, showing common courtesy and friendliness toward them when we meet and interact with them (Matthew 5:47).
- b. We will bless them, truly expressing with our lips our desires for their good even though they seek our hurt (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28).
- c. We will pray for them, crying out to the living God to have mercy upon them and do them good - especially the highest good of being saved from their sins (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28).
- d. We will not lash back at wrongs committed toward us with a spirit of revenge that does unto others what they have done to us. Rather we will respond with a meekness and generosity which treats others the way we would want to be treated if our roles were switched around (Luke 6:29-31).
- e. We will share with other men from what God has generously given us, even wicked men, not looking for anything in return, in order to meet real needs in their lives (Luke 6:35). We should share, as able, of our material possessions. And of course we should share the good news of Jesus Christ, freely and kindly.

We should love all men, even our enemies, because they are the needy handiwork of our God for which our God is greatly concerned - because in that way we show the reality of our sonship in God's family - and because in that way we will receive a great reward. However, we are totally unable to do this apart from the grace of God. We are unable to begin to do it toward the righteous and those closest to us - our family members and friends - let alone our enemies, if God does not come to our aid. So we need to cry aloud to the Lord for the needed grace if we would ever properly love our enemies.

2. What we have seen also calls us to a life of thankfulness for the many mercies a good God gives to us every hour and every moment. Remember, part of the description that Luke 6 gives of wicked men whom God loves is that they are unthankful. What a plague ingratitude is all too often in all of our hearts. How often our response is similar to that of the child, who, hearing his father speak of how good God had been to them that day, responded, "How is that true? What **new** thing has God done for us today?" Often all we can think about is that one problem or need which is troubling us while we are drinking in hourly and minute by minute and second by second the repeated and multiplied mercies of our God with a complaining spirit of ingratitude. How many are the mercies which should drive us to a spirit of thankfulness and to acts of praise to our God. These mercies, by the way, include thankfulness for our government, about which we may often be tempted to complain, but which every day does much to restrain wickedness and violence in the land.

3. From what we have seen of God's unconditional, general love of kindness, we are warned to not misread the Providence of God:

a. **You who are lost sinners are warned not to mistake God's kindnesses toward you as an indication that somehow all is well between you and God.** Heed the words of Romans 2:3-6:

³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who *will render to each one according to his deeds*:

God's goodness to you my dear unconverted friend is no indication that you may rest in complacency and unconcern. It rather is a clarion call to you to repent before it is too late.

b. **You who are the children of God are warned to not mistake God's kindnesses toward wicked men and the struggles of your own life to mean that somehow God's promises of blessing are not true, or that God has deserted you and there is no use in following Him.** The blessings of God's unconditional, general love are scattered indiscriminately and often unevenly at any one point in time for His own good purposes. On the prairies of Iowa, the summer thunderstorms often will drop much needed moisture on the parched earth of a wicked neighbor's field while the field of a righteous man right across the road will be left unwatered. Or hail will slice up the corn of the righteous man while sparing the nearby ungodly neighbor. On similar occasions in our own lives, we should remember the lessons taught by Job and by Asaph in Psalm 73. Do not forget the final end of the wicked and the righteous. For God's common love will one day soon end for the wicked, while the glory and blessing to come for the righteous cannot be fathomed.

Having now studied the electing or choosing love of God for men, and the general or common love of God for men, we are ready to consider a third dimension of God's love for men:

PART THREE - GOD'S LOVE OF DELIGHT OR COMPLACENCY

CHAPTER ONE - WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

As we have seen, the two dimensions of God's love toward men which we have already studied are indeed unconditional love, rightly defined. But they are far from the notions of the world, and often are quite different from the notions of many Christians when it comes to the subject of unconditional love.

However, there is a third dimension of God's love for men presented in God's Word which could not be more directly opposed to common ideas about unconditional love in our day than it is. I am speaking about **God's conditional love of delight or complacency**. Because this is a dimension or degree of the love of God which so flies in the face of the modern notion of unconditional love, and which raises important questions for the sensitive Christian, we will be pausing much longer here to open up and apply it.

But before we begin to do so, I want to further clarify the source and meaning of the traditionally-used terminology of God's love of **complacency**. This is because, in modern usage, this word has the connotation of being wrongfully self-satisfied in a way which ignores or neglects actual dangers or deficiencies. (E.g., staying in bed when the house is burning down.) Of course, it would be wrong to so picture God as being complacent in His love. However, there is a less common meaning of the word "complacency" - that of simply being satisfied, or having quiet pleasure in something or someone. It was this more general meaning which was intended by theologians when they in the past labeled this dimension of God's love as His love of complacency. The biblical source of this terminology is Zephaniah 3:17 which says of God that He will "rest in His love" (KJV) or "be quiet in His love" (NASB). In conclusion, if our terms are properly defined, the dimension of God's love which we are about to study may rightly be called His love of complacency (which is the more historical terminology).

However, based upon the more extensive and clearer biblical materials which we are about to study, I believe that "love of delight" is a more adequate, and less easily misunderstood terminology.

Having sought to clarify our terminology, consider with me now five elements of God's love of complacency or delight.

First of all:

ITS DEFINITE CONDITIONALITY.

I have indicated that there is a dimension of God's love which is conditional - which in some way depends upon the behavior or character of the one to whom it is extended or expressed. Even as a mother may make a child's visit to the park to play conditional upon the satisfactory completion of his schoolwork, so also, I am saying that there is a dimension of God's love which will not be expressed toward men unless they have met certain conditions.

Now on what basis do I claim that the living God loves with a conditional love? It is the best basis possible, for the Word of God clearly teaches such a conditional love. We could adequately prove this by turning to just one text. However, since this is such a controversial subject in our day among even evangelical, theologically-conservative Christians, we will pause here awhile to firmly establish this fact. Notice with me four lines of evidence that the living God shows conditional love toward men:

1. God showed conditional love toward Old Covenant Israel. Consider Deuteronomy 7:6-13:

⁶For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; ¹⁰and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. ¹¹Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. ¹²Then it shall come to pass, **because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them**, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. ¹³And **He will love you** and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you'

In verses 6 to 8 there is a description of **God's unconditional electing love for the physical nation of Israel** which caused Him to specially choose her instead of the other nations, not for anything in herself, but because of the choosing love and resulting covenant oath of God.

However, a very different dimension of God's love is described in the same chapter in verses 12 to 13. Here we find God promising that He will love and bless these Israelites **because** they listen to His judgments and do them. And by implication the Lord was also evidently declaring that they would not know His love and blessing if they refused to listen to His judgments and do them. In other words, there was something in their actions and behavior which was required to draw out the love of God toward them. This love was conditional. Its reception with the accompanying blessing depended upon their behavior and character. This was a responsive love.

But furthermore, notice also that:

2. God showed conditional love toward His own incarnate Son. We could also consider John 15:9-10, but at this point I would focus your attention upon the words of our Lord in John 10:17:

'Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.'

Jesus declared that there was a specific reason why His Heavenly Father loved Him. It was because He obediently and certainly was humbling Himself and laying down His life for the sheep. The clear implication is that the Father would not have loved Him - at least not in the same way or to the same degree - if He had not so willingly and sacrificially obeyed His heavenly Father in going to the cross. The love of the Father here for His

divine Son who had become a man living upon the earth was a conditional love - a love dependent upon and responsive to the moral nature of the Son's actions.

But also observe that:

3. God shows conditional love toward the true saints in every age. Proverbs 8:17 could be added to the three passages to which I direct you below in support of this assertion. First of all consider Proverbs 15:8-9:

⁸The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD,
But the prayer of the upright *is* His delight.

⁹The way of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD,
But He loves him who follows righteousness.

We are told here that the LORD loves him who follows righteousness. As proof that this love is conditioned upon the moral behavior of the one receiving it, there is a definite contrast with the wicked whose way and even religious activities are an abomination to the LORD. Here is indeed God's conditional love of the righteous.

Notice the words of the Lord Jesus in John 14:21-23:

²¹ `He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.' ²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, `Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?' ²³Jesus answered and said to him, `If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'

This section from our Lord's upper room discourse on the evening before His crucifixion is probably the clearest, and thus the most important passage on the conditional love of God for men. The Lord Jesus first of all declared that the proof that a man loves Him is that he has and keeps Christ's commandments. But then He went on to state that the one who so loves Him will be loved both by the Father and the Lord Jesus, and this will be made evident by the Son's disclosing of Himself to that one who loves Him.

Judas, one of the twelve disciples, but not Judas Iscariot, had a question. He could not understand how it was that Jesus' loving revelation of Himself was going to be limited to just themselves, and not to the rest of the world. Even at this early date, followers of Christ apparently had trouble understanding and embracing the conditional love of God!

Jesus again responded in much the same way as before to underscore how vitally important it was that one properly love God and Christ if such manifestations of God's love were to be expected and received. There was a personal responsibility in the matter, and not even the twelve Apostles could carelessly and presumptively ignore our Lord's words. If they truly loved Him, they would keep His word, and His Father would love him, and both Father and Son would come to him and abide with him - amazing words indeed! But the bottom line was that the love of God and of Christ for men in these verses was a conditional love which was extended to only those (and all of those) who had and kept Christ's commandments and words.

Notice also our Lord's words in John 16:26-27:

²⁶ `In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.'

Here is one further passage from Christ's discourse on the night before His awful crucifixion. In verse 26 the Lord Jesus was evidently declaring that, when they asked something in His name, it would not be necessary for Him to intercede for them in order that they might be heard before God's throne of grace, for the Father Himself loved them. And why was that? Because they had loved Jesus, and had believed that Jesus had come forth from the Father. In other words, the Father's love again was conditional. It was given to those who loved and believed in His Son Jesus Christ - to all true saints or Christians.

But finally, focus with me upon a fourth line of argument for the conditional love of God toward men - one to which we briefly alluded when considering Proverbs 15:8-9:

4. **God has an opposite response to those who are wicked in their behavior and character.** Although we could also turn to other passages like Proverbs 6:16-19 and Psalm 11:5 to support this argument, notice with me the contents of just one passage - Psalms 5:4-6:

⁴For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,
Nor shall evil dwell with You.

⁵The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;
You hate all workers of iniquity.

⁶You shall destroy those who speak falsehood;
The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Just as surely as the living God loves those who truly love Him and obey Him with a conditional love, so He hates and abhors with a conditional hatred those who live wicked lives. As was true with God's electing love, His conditional love has its opposite response in God - His hatred of the wicked. This hatred underscores in a negative way the conditionality of His love for the righteous.

In conclusion, from God's love for Old Covenant Israel, for His Son, and for all true saints, and from His opposite response of hatred for the wicked, we see that God truly does love men with a conditional love - a love that is extended only and always to those who meet His conditions as far as their moral behavior and character are concerned.

We are now ready to take up a further matter regarding God's conditional love:

ITS PECULIAR NATURE.

Beside the fact that this love is conditioned upon the behavior and character of the recipients, what is it that distinguishes it from other types of God's love? Consider again Proverbs 15:8-9:

⁸The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

⁹The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But He loves him who follows righteousness.

These two verses each are divided into two phrases which, in typical Hebrew poetic style, say the opposite of what is said by the other. In the first verse, that which is an abomination to the Lord is set in contrast with that which is His delight. Then in verse 9 we again are confronted with that which is an abomination to the Lord, and it is contrasted with the persons whom He loves. Since the first parts of both verses have to do with that which is an abomination to the Lord, it is right to conclude that the latter parts of both verses also refer to the same or a similar response. In other words, the love which the Lord has for those who pursue righteousness is a love of delighting in them. God responds toward these righteous, upright ones with true delight and pleasure. Interestingly, the word here translated "delight" is also often translated with the idea of acceptance. So in view here is a love of God which involves His delight in and acceptance of those whom He loves. Observe a second passage which we have already considered, Psalm 5:4-6:

⁴For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,
Nor shall evil dwell with You.

⁵The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;
You hate all workers of iniquity.

⁶You shall destroy those who speak falsehood;
The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Here the idea we saw in the previous passage is stated in a negative way. Verse 4 tells us that God does not delight in or take pleasure in wickedness. In other words, that which is the opposite of God's love - God's hatred (verse 5) - is the opposite of God's delight in or pleasure in something or someone. And thus, not surprisingly, according to verse 6 His hatred is described in parallel language as an abhorrence of the man of bloodshed and deceit.

Thus the conditional love of God described in the verses we have read is a love of delighting in, having pleasure

in, and accepting its objects, as opposed to God's hatred which abhors, is revolted and turned off by, and ultimately destroys its objects.

An illustration might be to contrast two eating experiences. How do you respond when a nice Italian dish with delicious sauces and spices - one which gets better as time passes - is removed from the refrigerator, heated up in the microwave, and appealingly served to you? There is a response of real delight and pleasure and acceptance. But what if a sealed plastic container has gotten lost in the bottom of the refrigerator for, who knows how long, so that it is covered with green and black mold and slime, and then is plunked down cold before you at the table still in the plastic container. How would you respond then? With a revulsion and abhorrence and rejection that could not rest content until the rotting dish was put down the disposal or in the garbage. In a limited way this is the contrast present in God's love of delight and hatred of abhorrence.

At this point we learn an important distinction regarding God's love in particular (and love in general) as presented in the Bible. There are **at least two major elements of love which may each on their own be called love, and which may or may not be found together.** There is **the purposeful setting of oneself to do good to another.** This element is prominent in God's electing love and general love - both of which together are often called **God's love of benevolence.** Then there is **the response of delight and pleasure in another.** **God's love of complacency** or delight emphasizes this element, although it also includes a purposeful setting of oneself to do good to another.

Having now considered the nature of this conditional love of God for man, notice thirdly:

ITS DUAL EXPLANATION.

Why is it that the Lord responds with a love of complacency or delight toward the righteous who love Him and keep His commandments? What is it that drives this delighting love? And why does He respond with a hatred of abhorrence and revulsion toward the wicked? The answer to these questions may be considered in two parts. First:

1. **Because of the character of God.** From beginning to end, our Bibles confront us with the living God who reveals Himself to be a perfectly holy, just and righteous God. He is without any taint of moral impurity. In fact, He Himself is the great standard of what is right and wrong. Because of His holy character, He responds with delight to that which corresponds with and reflects His own glorious holiness and righteousness. Thus we read in Psalm 37:28:

For the LORD loves justice,
And does not forsake His saints;
They are preserved forever, . . .

The Lord loves what is just and right, and therefore He loves those whose lives are characterized by doing justice and righteousness. Likewise, because the Lord is holy, He cannot stand that which is wicked and defiling and impure. He is repulsed by that which is contrary and in opposition to all that He is as God, and to all He has decreed that His image bearers should be and do. As we have seen in Psalm 5:4-6, the Lord hates what is wicked and false, and thus He hates those whose lives are characterized by doing wickedness and bringing forth iniquity.

In conclusion, the holy character of God is the explanation for His love of delight or complacency. He responds with pleasure and acceptance toward that which agrees with and is favorably disposed toward His own being. And He is repelled by that which is in opposition to His being.

However, at this point, a question may legitimately be raised. God's love of complacency or delight is extended toward those who love Him and keep His commandments. Does this mean that man is the initiator here, and that God is simply the responder to what man does, so that He responds to man's own efforts to clean up his act and love God? This question brings us to a second part of our explanation of why God responds as He does. Not only is it because of His holy character. It is also:

2. **Because of the redemptive handiwork of God.** We earlier noted that an explanation for God's general or common love to all men living on this present earth is that it is directed toward God's handiwork in the first creation. God has made all men, whether good or evil, and thus they still in this life reflect something of His

glory. He has therefore committed Himself in the Noahic covenant to care for all His creatures on the earth during this age.

In a similar way, God's love of complacency or delight may be explained by the fact that it is directed toward God's handiwork in the new creation. It is true that this love is the response of the heart of God to man's true love to him. But the Apostle John who penned John 14:21-23 also penned the following words in I John 4:10 & 19:

¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. . . ¹⁹We love Him because He first loved us.

In other words, our love for God did not come first in time. It followed God's love for us manifested in the sending of His Son to die on a cross to appease God's wrath toward His elect ones. Furthermore, as we have seen, our love for God followed the expression of His love for us in making us alive together with Christ when we were dead in our trespasses (Ephesians 2:4-5). Here we see the electing love of God and the complacent love of God coming together, for **in a real sense God's love of complacency is the response of His heart to the outworking of His electing love in the hearts and lives of His saints.** His love of complacency is His response to His own handiwork in the new creation. Apart from this new creating activity there would be no suitable objects for His love of complacency, for all men are by nature totally depraved and spiritually dead God-haters. But having changed the hearts of His elect, and having made them obedient lovers of Himself, the Lord naturally delights in His handiwork, for it reflects His own character and brings glory to His name.

This then is an attempt to explain God's love of complacency. But notice in the fourth place:

ITS GLORIOUS BENEFITS.

As we noted earlier, God in His love of complacency or delight does purpose to do good to those whom He so loves. He promises that certain blessings will be experienced by all those who satisfy His conditions. And what are those blessings? Observe again the words of John 14:21 & 23:

²¹He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.' . . ²³Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'

The Lord Jesus here declared that three closely-related blessings will be associated with His responsive love of delight or complacency:

1. **Jesus will disclose Himself** to the one whom He and the Father so loves (verse 21). He will unveil something of Himself to these beloved ones. But also:
2. **Both the Father and the Son will come to that person** (verse 23). It is one thing to have someone reveal or disclose Himself to you - perhaps in an indirect way by phone or letter. It is another thing for that person to actually come and personally interact with you. And it is especially a great privilege when it is none other than God the Father and our God and Savior Jesus Christ who are the visitors. But there is even more:
3. **Both the Father and the Son will make their abode with the person so loved** (verse 23). This is not just a one-time visit which is promised. Rather, it is the permanent presence of all three persons of the Godhead (compare verse 16 regarding the Holy Spirit).
4. A fourth and final, related benefit is implied in John 16:26-7 which again reads:

²⁶In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.'

Here we learn that **there will be unrestricted access to God the Father Himself in Jesus name.** There will be

open communication and communion with the living God. Now these are great benefits indeed. But none of them should surprise us when we remember that those receiving these blessings are those who are the objects of God's love of delight. When we really love someone with great delight, what is our response on the level of human relationships? When a single young man begins to especially delight in a single young lady (or vice versa), does he not want to open up himself to her and reveal his heart, be around her, dwell with her in marriage(!), and make himself accessible to her so that she can freely communicate to him and commune with him?

That which is true on a human level is but a faint reflection of the blessings resulting from God's amazing love of delight in His children. He opens Himself up to us so that we come to know Him even better - not through supernatural visions and revelations, but by His Spirit working through His great revelation of Himself in His Word. He comes to us by His Spirit. He dwells with us, taking up residence in our hearts. He makes Himself accessible to commune with us so that we may freely approach His throne of grace in Jesus' name. These blessings are not merely objective blessings, declared by God to exist (although they certainly do exist for every true Christian). They are blessings which He intends that His children will personally experience as the fruits of His delighting love for them. In the words of Matthew Henry, "**He loves them, and lets them know that he loves them, smiles upon them, and embraces them.**"⁽⁹⁾ In light of the greatness of the blessings here promised, every human being upon the face of the earth with any spiritual sanity whatsoever should want to be the object of God's and Christ's love of delight so that he might know and experience these blessings for himself. So having noted the benefits of this love, notice in the final place:

ITS CONDITIONAL RECEPTION.

How may I come to be the object of the complacent love of Christ and of His Father, and thereby partake of its promised blessings? Although in a real sense this love is God's response to His own handiwork in the lives of His saints, it is conditioned upon the actions and character of those to whom it is offered. We must meet certain conditions if we would know the benefits of being loved by God with His love of delight. What are they?

1. According to John 14:21&23, **we must truly love the Lord Jesus Christ.** We must stop hating Him, and abhorring Him, and refusing to come to Him and dwell with Him. We must instead come to delight in Him. We must open up ourselves - all that is in our hearts - to Him, come to Him, desire to dwell with Him, and be accessible to His communications to us.

2. **We must have and keep Christ's commandments.** First of all we must have Christ's commandments. We must come to know and understand what it is that He has told us we must do. This means we must study our Bibles and listen carefully to faithful preaching and teaching from Christ's Word which is the Scriptures. But this is not enough. We must then do what Christ tells us to do. We must manifest that we have a love which is a proper love for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords - a love which responds in godly fear and respect and submission and obedience to the will of our Lord.

But furthermore, there are two specific initial ways in which we must keep Christ's commandments and word if we would ever begin to be loved with His love of delight:

3. **We must repent thoroughly of our sins.** Notice the words of Hosea 14:1-4 which were in context applicable to Old Covenant Israel, but which are still very much applicable to us under the New Covenant:

¹O Israel, return to the LORD your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity;
²Take words with you, And return to the LORD.
Say to Him, `Take away all iniquity;
Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.
³Assyria shall not save us,
We will not ride on horses,
Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands,
"You are our gods."
For in You the fatherless finds mercy.'
⁴I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,

For My anger has turned away from him.'

If we would ever have the living God love us with a love of delight, we must be done with our sins including putting our confidence in anything or anyone other than the Lord. We must return to Him, and plead with Him for pardon. Only in this way can we ever expect Him to stop being angry with us and to love us freely, without any reservations.

There is one other closely-related initial act of obedience which must be true of us if we would ever even begin to know the delighting love of God:

4. We must believe in and commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. Remember what John 16:27 says:

`. . . the Father Himself loves you, **because you** have loved Me, and **have believed that I came forth from God.**'

No man, woman or child may ever hope to know the delighting smile and love of God the Father unless he has come to believe that Jesus came from the Father. In other words, he must believe that Jesus Christ was no mere man but rather was the Son of God who came to earth from heaven as the promised Messiah as the Lamb of God who would save his people from their sins. He must put the entire trust of his soul upon Christ for the forgiveness of his sins and the saving of his soul to all eternity.

These then are the requirements of God if we would ever know His delighting love. We must truly love the Father and the Son, proving it by our wholehearted obedience of all their commandments - especially the specific requirements of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider one final matter regarding God's conditional love of complacency or delight:

ITS GODWARD LESSONS.

1. From the last two specific requirements for knowing God's love of delight for us - repentance for our sins and faith in Christ - **we are helped to understand why this love of delight is conditional.** For these requirements are Gospel commands. Christ's Gospel is a conditional Gospel. You will never be saved from your sins, death and hell unless you meet the conditions of the Gospel and repent and believe in Christ. So also, you will never experience the ultimate of God's love for you unless you meet the conditions laid down by God including Gospel conditions.

This lesson has special application to those who do not know the Lord. But there are further lessons to be gleaned for true Christians:

2. From the conditions laid down for experiencing God's love of delight, **we clearly see what the problem is if we are not knowing Christ's manifestation of Himself and His presence and abiding with us** as Christians. Listen to a quote from John Brown:

`. It may be said - it has often been said - "Is it not a fact that many true Christians are often without comfort, and enjoy but in a small degree the peace of God, which passeth all understanding?" Admitting the fact, the question naturally arises, "What is the state of their mind and heart in reference to Christ and his words, when they are in this condition?" Are they, having his word, loving him? are they, loving him, keeping his sayings? If they are, we deny that they are - that they can be - destitute of comfort, except from the influence of mental or bodily disease. We must never doubt the declaration of the faithful and true Witness - "If any man will love me, and keep my words, my Father will love; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." These words are too plain to be misunderstood; and while none can misapprehend their meaning, who dare question their truth? With the exception already made (mental or bodily disease), want of spiritual comfort on the part of Christians, must be traced to deficient or mistaken views of the Gospel - of the salvation of Christ - or of the way in which it is brought near to them as sinners, and is to be received by them; or to some prejudice against the way of salvation, in its absolute freedom, originating in these deficient and mistaken views, leading them to expect comfort from themselves, and not from the finished work of Christ clearly revealed in the Gospel, and to

place that dependence on fluctuating feelings which can be safely rested only on eternal truth; or finally to the indulgence of some sinful affection, of the neglect of some duty - the commission of some sin. They are not keeping Christ's word; and it is therefore that he does not manifest himself to them - that he does not come and make his abode with them. . . '

It does seem very plain, that the power of the truth to comfort can be experienced only by believing it. It is God dwelling in the heart, through the belief of the truth, who is 'the God of all consolation.'

Alas, how little of this holy happiness is enjoyed by us Christians, in comparison of what might be. And what is, and what can be the reason? Ah, it is not far to seek. It is to be found in our ignorance, our unbelief, our indolence, our love of the world, our neglect of what we know to be right, our doing what we know to be wrong. And shall we rather forego these manifestations of the Redeemer, shall we shut the door against the heavenly visitant, who would come and make his abode with us, rather than renounce and crucify our sinful propensities, mortify our worldly affections, and give all diligence to grow in knowledge, and faith, and love, and holiness? 'Ah, how much do we, by our indolence and worldliness, deprive ourselves of! and for what do we sacrifice such high and holy delights? For some paltry perishing gratification, or because we will not be at the pains rightly to understand our privileges, or the order established for obtaining the enjoyment of them.'

Let us form a juster estimate of these high and holy privileges. Let us be persuaded that, in comparison of them, everything called enjoyment is insipid and worthless. Let us seek in a larger measure of the character, with the possession of which their enjoyment is so inseparably connected. Oh, let us avoid everything that unfits us for manifestations of Christ, for the coming and abode of the Father - everything fitted to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit who brings the Father and the Son to us. . . "⁽¹⁰⁾

The sweeping nature of the conditions for God's love of delight - true love for God evidenced by obedience to all His commands - tells us that we must be done with a view of true religion which concludes that one will be miserable and unhappy if he is too serious about it. Rather, the words of Christ indicate that we cannot be too serious about the Christian religion - that the most comfort and blessing in true religion is inseparably connected with the most seriousness and whole-heartedness in loving and obeying Christ and His heavenly Father.

But finally consider a further application for true believers:

3. We clearly see how graciously Christ views and responds to the little grace which we possess. May I remind you once again of the words of John 16:27?

' . . . the Father Himself loves **you**, because **you have loved Me**, and **have believed that I came forth from God.**'

These words were spoken to disciples who a few minutes later would slumber while this same Jesus agonized alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then would flee from their Lord and desert Him as He was arrested. Amazing words - these of the Lord Jesus - on the threshold of such manifestations of weakness and unbelief and sin in His beloved disciples. What a great encouragement these words should be to the true child of God. They tell us that even when we come to God's conditional love of complacency or delight, we are ultimately in the realm of God's grace, not that of legal merit. Otherwise, Christ's words here make absolutely no sense. Such words should fill our hearts with amazement and gratitude that the living God should ever delight in the likes of us.

This then completes our study of the biblical description of God's love of delight or complacency, and of all three dimensions of God's love toward men. We still must consider whether this third dimension - God's love of delight - is to be imitated in our own dealings with our fellow men. This latter portion of our study will be fairly lengthy. But before proceeding to take it up, let us summarize the three dimensions of God's love to men as they relate to the concept of conditional love.

There are two dimensions of God's love which are unconditional if properly defined from the Word of God, and one which is conditional.

First there are the two unconditional dimensions which together are often referred to as God's love of benevolence:

1. There is the electing or choosing love of God. Out of love the living God before the foundation of the earth

was laid chose those who would be His children. His love for them was unconditional in that nothing in those chosen including their moral behavior and character was the basis for God's setting His electing love upon them.

2. There is also the general love of God. This is God's love toward all men upon the earth expressed in His kindness and mercy to them short of salvation from their sins in other words, His common grace. This love is also unconditional in that it is shown to the wicked as well as the righteous. He sends the sun and the rain upon both groups of mankind.

However, we have also found that God's unconditional love in both of its dimensions has its limits, and is not a love which is indifferent or permissive regarding man's behavior. It is not the unconditional love of the humanist who tells us that we should love everybody all the time, and be permissive and tolerant and morally non-restrictive, even toward our children, if we are to truly love with an unconditional love.

1. The electing love of God lasts forever, but it is not directed toward all man. Its objects are only the elect or chosen ones as opposed to the reprobate. And all those whom God's electing love chooses will not be allowed to go on living their previously wicked lives as they jolly well please. They will certainly be graciously transformed by the sovereign power of God into a perfect moral conformity with the perfectly righteous and holy Son of God.

2. In contrast with God's electing love, the general love of God **is** directed to all men living on earth, but it likewise has its own limits. It is limited in the degree or extent of its benefits, for it falls short of salvation, man's greatest need. It is limited in the degree to which it reflects the whole heart of God toward men; for toward the wicked, God feels true hatred as well as true love. And for the wicked it is limited in its duration, for as soon as the impenitent sinner crosses the threshold of eternity through death, God's general love toward him ceases to be unconditional, and comes to a sudden end as he is plunged into the eternal, unrelenting torment which is God's righteous judgment against him. Furthermore, a key expression of this general love is the sincere offer of a Gospel which refuses to accept men where they are, bound in their sins, but which instead calls them to repent and turn away from their present wicked lifestyle and to in faith seek the forgiveness for their wickedness in the person of a substitute the crucified Son of God, Jesus Christ.

These two dimensions of God's love toward men electing and general love are indeed unconditional love, rightly defined. But they are far from the notions of the world, and often are quite different from the notions of many Christians when it comes to the subject of unconditional love.

As we have just seen, there is also a third dimension of God's love for men presented in God's Word which could not be more directly opposed to common ideas about unconditional love in our day than it is, for this dimension of love the love of delight or complacency is conditional. In other words, this dimension of love is extended only toward those who meet the conditions which have just been outlined.

With this overview before us, we come now to take up a further question regarding God's condition love of delight toward men:

CHAPTER TWO - SHOULD WE IMITATE IT?

Thus far in our study of the third dimension of God's love for men - that of His delight or complacency - we have focused upon God's own responses toward men. However, there is a further major issue regarding God's love of delight which remains to be addressed - that of **its imitation**. When we come to the matter of imitating God's love of delight for men, the first and most foundational question with which we must grapple is: "Are we obligated by God to so imitate Him?" **Does the living God who loves only the righteous with a conditional love of delight require us to imitate him and love others conditionally as well in a similar way? Are we to love the righteous with a delighting love, and conversely, to hate the wicked with an abhorring hatred?** First of all consider with me:

FOUR LINES OF ARGUMENT OR PROOF THAT SUCH IS OUR DUTY.

We will begin with the most general argument, and then will proceed to the most direct and pointed.

1. First of all, **a key characteristic of true love** appears to point to our duty to love with a similar love of

delight. Consider 1 Corinthians 13:1-4a, 6:

¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ²And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and although I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴Love . . . ⁶does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

Here we are told that that true love without which we are nothing is a love which, among other things, "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth . . ." It is not only impossible for a godly man to rejoice in wickedness in the lives of others and go on treating wicked men as if everything about them is wonderful and acceptable. It is downright wicked to do so. True love cannot be morally neutral or morally non-restrictive in its approach - whether we are talking about benevolent love which is seeking to do true good to a man, or delighting love which is delighting in its object. And the latter - delighting or rejoicing love - appears to be especially in focus in I Corinthians 13:6.

But there is a second line of argument for our imitation of God's conditional love of delight:

2. Divine commands to love our Christian brethren specifically. There are many, many passages to which we could refer, but at this point I would point you to just one - I John 4:21:

And this commandment we have from Him (God): that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

Christians are directed to specifically love one particular group of men from among the mass of mankind - their brethren in Christ - fellow Christians. Now I believe that this command to love our brethren in Christ implies the showing of a conditional love of delight for them which is not shown to other men. But that which is implied becomes much more clear when we view the opposite response of the wicked world toward Christians described in John 15:17-20:

¹⁷These things I command you, that you love one another. ¹⁸If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.'

The Lord Jesus, after repeating His command that His disciples love their fellow disciples of Christ, pointed to the contrast of the wicked world. The wicked world does not love Christ's disciples because it hates Christ, and because Christ's disciples are not part of the wicked world. They are different. The worldling does not feel comfortable around them, but instead feels condemned by their righteous words and lives. Thus the wicked world despises true Christians and mistreats them, while it loves its own (other wicked men) with a love of delight which often treats them well (at least outwardly). The wicked world has its own love of delight and its own hatred of abhorrence which perversely operate in a way completely opposite to God's love of delight and hatred of abhorrence (described in Proverbs 29:27). Believers should not be surprised by that fact. They should instead imitate God and turn their back upon the example of the wicked world by loving true Christian brothers with delight instead of despising them. Thus, the Lord Jesus, by the contrast made with the world, showed that He was referring to a specific, conditional love of delight when He commanded that we love our Christian brethren. We are to love them **because** they are brothers in Christ.

The first two proofs of our obligation to love men with a conditional love of delight have been more general and indirect. But now we come to two more direct proofs. First, we are given:

3. The examples of godly men in the Word of God. Briefly notice with me examples of both those whom the godly man loves with a love of delight and those whom he hates with a hatred of abhorrence (drawing from a number of passages to which we could turn):

First, **positively**, I would refer you to Psalm 16:2-3:

²*O my soul*, you have said to the LORD,

`You are my Lord,
 My goodness is nothing apart from You' -
³And to the saints who are on the earth,
 `They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.'

For the psalmist, it was the saints who are on the earth who were the delight of His heart along with his Lord. This response of the love of delight for God's people characterized this man of God.

But there is a **negative** side to this love of delight as well. And it is crucial that we establish this negative side in order to rightly view and practice the positive love of delight. Observe two out of many other verses we could consider (including Psalms 15:4a; 26:4-5; 31:6; 101:3-4; 139:19-22; Proverbs 29:27, etc.):

I hate the double-minded,
 But I love Your law. (Psalm 119:113)

The Psalmist declared that he hated those who are double-minded - those who do not definitely come out as loyal followers of the Lord, but who instead keep wavering back and forth. He hated them because of his unalterable love for the law of God which these wavering individuals obviously did not love.

I see the treacherous, and am disgusted,
 Because they do not keep Your word. (Psalm 119:158)

Here we see that the Psalmist loathed the treacherous man. Why? Because that wicked man had inflicted personal injury on the Psalmist and he wanted to get even? No, but rather because such treacherous individuals do not keep the word of God. He was responding with loathing out of a delight in and zeal for the commands of His holy God which were being trampled upon by such wicked men. These passages of God's Word and others clearly establish that righteous men respond with a love of delight for the righteous, and with a hatred of loathing for the wicked.

But there is one final line of proof which is most striking:

4. **God's rebuke of righteous Jehoshaphat.** Here I would direct your attention to 2 Chronicles 18:1-3, 33-34, 19:1-3:

^{18:1}Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab. ²After some years he went down to *visit* Ahab in Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up *with him* to Ramoth Gilead. ³So Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, `Will you go with me *against* Ramoth Gilead?' And he answered him, `I *am* as you *are*, and my people as your people; *we will be* with you in the war.'

^{18:33}Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, `Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded.' ³⁴The battle increased that day, and the king of Israel propped *himself* up in *his* chariot facing the Syrians until evening; and about the time of sunset he died.

^{19:1}Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. ²And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, `Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD *is* upon you. ³Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God.'

Here the Lord through His prophet Jehu strongly rebuked Jehoshaphat, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, for loving those who hate the Lord by going to battle to help wicked King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel. But you might protest, "I thought we are to love all men. What is the Lord talking about here?" He obviously was not referring to a general love of kindness for all men (which **is** commanded **in the Old Testament** (Proverbs 25:21-2) as well as in the New). Instead, the Lord evidently was speaking here of a conditional love of delight. And He clearly indicates that righteous Jehoshaphat was obligated to love only the righteous with this love of delight, while he was to hate with loathing the wicked like Ahab. For the failure to properly love and hate here brought down on Jehoshaphat's head the wrath of God.

Therefore, based upon the biblical evidences we have seen, the Word of God does require us to love righteous men with a conditional love of delight, and to on the other hand hate wicked men with a conditional hatred of loathing. We are clearly obligated by God Himself to imitate Him in the matter of conditional love.

Having observed four proofs for our obligation to imitate God's conditional love of delight, we next take up:

FURTHER REASONS TO IMITATE GOD'S LOVE OF DELIGHT.

We have already noted **the most basic reason why we should be concerned to love the righteous with a conditional love of delight (and to hate the wicked with a conditional hatred of abhorrence) - because God tells us to do so.** That would be reason enough if that was all the motivation given to us. However, the Word of God provides us with more arguments to imitate our God in this matter.

1. **Negatively**, as we have just seen in 2 Chronicles 19:2, we should love the righteous and hate the wicked in the way indicated **in order to avoid the wrath of an offended God against us.** Although Jehoshaphat was a righteous man, and ultimately arrived safely in heaven, he yet incurred God's wrath in this life by his disobedience at this point. His family was ultimately nearly annihilated because of his folly in this matter - no little thing.

2. **Positively**, we should imitate God's love of delight for several closely-related reasons.

a. **The first reason** is found repeatedly in 1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-19; 4:7-12; 4:20-5:1:

^{2:9}He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

^{3:10}In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. ¹¹For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹²not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. ¹⁵Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

^{4:7}Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

^{4:20}If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? ²¹And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also. ^{5:1}Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

Why love your brother with a special love of delight? **Because in this way you give proof that you abide in the light, are a child of God, have passed out of death into life, have the love of God abiding in you, are of the truth, are born of God, know God, have God abiding in you, have his love perfected in you, and are a true lover of God - in other words, that you are a true Christian.** If you do not imitate God's conditional love by especially loving God's children, you have no basis to say that you have been saved from your sin and

eternal destruction.

Rather, if you hate Christian brethren (and there is no middle ground for John) you are a murderer (1 John 3:10) and the child of the devil (1 John 3:15). According to John 15:18-19 (to which we just referred), it is the wicked world which hates true believers while loving and delighting in its own, the wicked. A failure to love one's brother with a love of delight is therefore to act like the wicked world. And, if this is a pattern of one's life, it is to show oneself to still be part of the wicked world.

Let me underscore this again. In the realm of the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence, there is no neutral ground. These responses are invariably found among all men - whether righteous or wicked. Such responses are not the sole property of God and His children. You cannot point to the Christian responding with a biblical hatred of abhorrence and condemn him for being so unloving and intolerant in contrast with worldlings around him. The issue is not whether or not we love with a love of delight and hate with a hatred of abhorrence. The issue instead is which way that love and hatred is directed. Their direction is reversed in the wicked in comparison with the righteous because in this group they have been completely twisted and turned on their head. The wicked love the wicked and hate the righteous because they are enemies of Christ. There is no neutral ground. How you respond shows what kind of person you are.

This then is the first positive reason to imitate God's conditional love of delight. But there is:

b. **A second, closely-related reason** to do so. As we saw before in John 14:21, the one who has and keeps the commandments of Christ is the one who will be loved with a love of delight by God the Father and by His Son Jesus Christ. But interestingly, there is only one specific commandment explicitly labeled as a commandment by Christ during the Upper Room Discourse on the night before His death. Notice one place where it is mentioned in John 15:10-14:

¹⁰'If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹²This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ¹⁴You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.'

Why imitate our God's love of delight by loving our brethren? **Because in this way you cause God and Christ to love you with a love of delight with all its blessings.**

c. The Bible also gives us **a third reason** to imitate God's love of delight toward the righteous and hatred of abhorrence toward the wicked - a reason which further puts the lie to the notion that you can imitate only the love side and not the hate side of God's love of delight. We especially are to loathe the wicked **because only in this way are we allowed to abide in God's tent and to dwell in His holy hill.** Observe this in Psalm 15:1-2a; 4a&b:

¹LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?
²He . . .
⁴In whose eyes a vile person is despise,
But he honors those who fear the LORD; . . .

You will only be allowed to abide in God's presence in this life and into all eternity if you share His despising of the wicked and vile person. Otherwise, you will not be present in heaven on the final day. I did not write that - the living God did.

These then are further reasons why we should imitate God's love of delight and God's hatred of despise, in addition to His command to do so. Negatively, in order to avoid His wrath. Positively, in order to show that we are Christians, to experience God's love of delight toward us, and to be allowed to abide in God's special presence.

Before we press on to begin a further matter regarding our imitation of this dimension of God's love, please

pause with me to consider a serious matter of application. **The reality that God loves some men with a conditional love of delight and hates others with a conditional hatred of abhorrence, depending upon their character and actions, is an extremely unpopular truth in our day. So is the related reality that it is our duty to respond to men in the same way that God does.** These truths are extremely repugnant to the worldlying who only wants to hear of a tolerant, non-morally restrictive, unconditional love (so-called) which lets him go on merrily doing his own thing and living in his own favorite sins without experiencing anything "negative" to cramp his style and make him feel bad or guilty. However, the truths we have seen are also extremely repugnant to many evangelical, at least professing, Christians who love to talk about God's unconditional love of all men, but who bristle at the mention of His hating with abhorrence some men because they are wicked, and who are abhorred themselves by the idea that we are to respond the same way. Yet this is what God's Word teaches. This is why I have labored so hard to establish the proof of the divine requirement and to lay out the biblical reasons for doing our duty at this point.

My friend, the bottom line is that if you do not imitate God in loving the righteous with a love of delight and hating the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence, you have no basis to believe that you are a Christian and are on your way to heaven. It does no good to try to say that I hate the sin, but love the sinner (period). God's Word says that we are to hate the sinner as well as the sin (although we are also to love the sinner!). How do you respond to what we have seen? There may still be many legitimate questions in your mind regarding how to apply these truths practically. We are going to begin to grapple with some of those questions below. But the reality is that a proof of the genuineness of your Christian profession is that you imitate your God in the matter of loving men with a conditional love of delight. And a further reality is that, if you do not imitate God, you are already guilty of the opposite responses of despising the righteous and delighting in the wicked.

But you may be saying, "I do not deny that God's Word teaches God's conditional love of delight, and conditional hatred of abhorrence, and that we are to imitate both. But how do I do that in real practice?" This legitimate question requires that we next begin to take up practical guidelines for imitating God's conditional love of delight.

The practical outworking of a conditional love of delight and hatred of abhorrence is no light or simple matter, and thus it rightfully demands detailed attention.

First of all it is essential that we focus upon:

CHAPTER THREE - THE GREAT DIVIDE

There is first of all a positive guideline having to do with **the "who"** of the biblical duty to love conditionally. To whom do we show this conditional love and hatred? **We must always regulate our response according to that great foundational distinction which God makes between the two groups which together make up the totality of mankind on earth.** When it comes to the matter of loving with a love of delight and hating with a hatred of abhorrence, our response will be ultimately determined by the overarching spiritual condition of the person in question. Although this should be obvious from what we have already studied, it needs to be underscored.

May I first of all remind you of **the descriptions we have already studied of those whom God loves with delight and expects us to love in a like manner?** They are:

- those who are the saints who are on the earth (Psalm 16:3).
- those who follow righteousness (Proverbs 15:9).
- those who have and keep Christ's commands (including His commands to repent and believe in Him), and who love Him (John 14:21-23).
- those who are spiritual brothers in Christ's family (1 John 4:21).
- those who are the ones born of God the Father (1 John 5:1).

In other words, those whom we are to love with a love of delight are true Christians.

On the other hand, **who are those whom God hates with abhorrence and expects us to so hate?** They are:

- the boastful, workers of iniquity, those who speak falsehood, and the bloodthirsty and deceitful man

- (Psalm 5:5-6)
- the vile person (Psalm 15:4a)
- the double-minded (Psalm 119:113)
- the treacherous who do not keep God's word (Psalm 119:158), and:
- the wicked and those who hate the Lord (2 Chronicles 19:2).

In other words, those whom we are to hate with a hatred of abhorrence are those who are lost sinners and enemies of God.

There is a great divide which separates the entirety of mankind in the eyes of God, and which should bring forth from our hearts as Christians opposite responses. If you would merely look at the external appearance of members of each group mingled together, you generally would not be able to tell them apart. How then, you might ask, can we tell who we are to love with delight and who we are to hate with abhorrence? The descriptions we have just reviewed answer that question. We can tell them apart **by their heart attitudes and actions toward the person and law of God.**

Those in whom we are to delight are those who love God and delight to do His will so that by and large they do do His will, including repenting of their sins when they disobey, and believing the Gospel. Those whom we are to abhor are those who hate the Lord and who refuse to keep His Word including repenting of their sins and believing the Gospel, but instead live lives of wickedness and disobedience to the law of God. There is no other category. These are the only two. There is no group in between. You and every other person upon the face of the earth falls into one or the other category. And whether one is among the righteous lovers of God or the wicked haters of God determines God's attitude toward him, and the attitude which Christians should have toward him as well.

Thus, my Christian brother, when you are seeking to determine whom you must love with a love of delight, there is one foundational question which you must ask. Am I dealing with a brother begotten by God into the family of God? Am I dealing with a Christian - with a righteous man who has repented of his sin, is continuing to repent of his sin, believes the Gospel of Christ and lives a life characterized overall (although not perfectly) by obedience to the law of God? If so, I am obligated to love him with a love of delight. It matters not how much our personalities may clash. It matters not what areas of remaining sin in his life yet grieve and vex my soul. If I am dealing with a true Christian, whether my wife or husband or child or parent or pastor or fellow church member - whoever it may be - I am to delight in that individual with a love of delight, no matter who he or she is. I am to do so because God does so.

On the other hand, if I am dealing with one who is a wicked hater of God, there is to be a response of the hatred of abhorrence, no matter how outwardly nice that person may be - no matter how well our personalities and interests seem to blend. This is the response of the soul which is required if we are dealing with a member of the group of God-haters, no matter who he or she is. Now there is much more yet to be pursued by way of clarification and qualification, but we must never lose sight of this basic, foundational distinction.

This reality of the great divide among all mankind and of **God's attitude toward the wicked God-hater also has special application to you if you find yourself among that group.** In a real sense God hates and abhors you this very moment because you abhor Him and refuse to do His will. Remember, His hatred is a conditional, responsive hatred. How long will you allow this to go on? How long will you continue to provoke His frown and holy revulsion? For you know that the problem lies with you, not the living God. He is not lacking in righteous love - you are. Will you ultimately perish in hell as a monument to the universal house-cleaning of God as His long-suffering ends and He with abhorrence casts from His universe all that defiles it, and offends and despises Him? Do not delay. Seek the Lord while He may be found.

CHAPTER FOUR - HOW DO WE MANIFEST LOATHING HATRED?

There is a second positive practical guideline which has to do with **the "what"** of conditional love and hatred. What should we do if we are to obey our Lord in these matters? **Our responses toward both groups must be those indicated in Scripture.** What does the love of delight, and its opposite, the hatred of abhorrence, look like? How should we express these opposite responses?

We will first of all consider **the expression of the hatred of abhorrence toward the wicked.** This commanded

conditional hatred toward the wicked should include at least four things. First:

A TRUE HEART ATTITUDE OF ABHORRENCE TOWARD THE HATER OF GOD.

One who is responding aright most obviously will not have an enduring and satisfying pleasure in a wicked person, or in what he is doing spiritually and morally, but rather will be negative toward, and turned off and repulsed by his wicked character and deeds. I would remind you of Psalm 15:1&4a which we considered earlier in this study. The one who may abide in God's tabernacle is the one "In whose eyes a vile person is despised . . ." There should be a loathing of those who stand against the Lord. This should be the response of the heart, which leads to a second response:

AVOIDING THE CLOSE COMPANIONSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP OF THE WICKED.

Here I would remind you of the words of 2 Chronicles 18:1-3; 19:1-2:

^{18:1}Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab. ²After some years he went down to *visit* Ahab in Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up *with him* to Ramoth Gilead. ³So Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, 'Will you go with me *against* Ramoth Gilead?' And he answered him, 'I *am* as you *are*, and my people as your people; *we will be* with you in the war.'

^{19:1}Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. ²And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, 'Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD *is* upon you.'

Jehoshaphat closely associated himself with the house of Ahab - even taking Ahab's daughter as a wife for his son. He declared that he was as Ahab was, and his people as Ahab's people, and went to battle alongside Ahab. Thus he brought down upon his head the rebuke of the prophet for loving those who hate the LORD, and the wrath of God. By his sin, righteous Jehoshaphat became a living negative example of how we should treat the wicked - by rejecting them as far as **close** companionship and friendship are involved.

This of course does not mean that we should totally avoid social contact with the wicked, or we would be contradicting the example of our Lord who, not out of a compromising spirit which really loved the world, but rather for the sake of boldly seeking to do spiritual good to the worst of sinners, ate dinner with them and interacted with them. However, what we have seen does indicate that as far as close companionship are concerned, our attitude should be that of the Psalmist in Psalm 26:4-5:

⁴I have not sat with idolatrous mortals,
Nor will I go in with hypocrites.
⁵I have hated the congregation of evildoers,
And will not sit with the wicked.

If you rightly hate the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence, you certainly do not make them your intimate, close companions and friends. This includes the hypocrite - the double-minded man or woman - who may claim to be among the righteous but clearly is not.

This is a word of special importance for the lonely single young person who is tempted to pursue a romantic relationship with a "nice", lost young man or lady. Before you give way to that temptation remember the incredible grief and misery godly Jehoshaphat brought upon his own offspring in this matter. The daughter of ungodly Ahab which he took as wife for his son, Jehoram, was none other than Athaliah. Not surprisingly, Jehoram was a wicked king who caused Judah's glory to decline, who murdered all of his brothers (the other sons of Jehoshaphat) and who died after only an eight year reign (2 Chronicles 21:1-20). Jehoram's sons were all wiped out by raiders except his youngest son, Ahaziah, who thus became king. Ahaziah also did evil in the sight of the Lord due to the influence of his ungodly mother, Athaliah. He, along with 42 sons of his dead brothers, was killed by Jehu while in the northern kingdom of Israel with whom he was allied. This slaughter was part of the destruction of the offspring of Ahab which God had commanded in judgment upon Ahab (2 Chronicles 22:1-9 compare 2 Kings 10:12-14). Then Athaliah, out of incredible hatred and selfish ambition, sought to wipe out all of her own grandchildren and other relatives who might be heirs to the throne so she could

gain and keep the rule over Judah herself. It was only due to the grace of God and the courage of a sister of Ahaziah, Jehoshabeath, that one young son of Ahaziah, Joash, was spared and eventually came to the throne upon the righteous killing of Athaliah (2 Chronicles 22:10 - 23:21). But what a horrible price Jehoshaphat paid in lining up the marriage of his son to Athaliah. Every male offspring except one in the three generations following Jehoshaphat died prematurely, and Jehoshaphat's line was nearly extinguished. Even the sole surviving male heir, Joash, departed from the Lord in his later years (2 Chronicles 24:15-22). Truly the wrath of God had come upon Jehoshaphat and his family for this mixed marriage.

What makes you think you will escape such a sad ending dear Christian single if you choose to pursue a romantic relationship with an ungodly man or woman? Do not be a fool. Heed the warning of Jehoshaphat. This expression of abhorrence of the wicked - the avoiding of close companionship or friendship with them - is closely-related to a further expression:

REFUSING TO HELP THE WICKED IN PURSUING THEIR WICKEDNESS.

Remember again the rest of the rebuke of the prophet Jehu to Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 19:2: "**Should you help the wicked** and love those who hate the LORD? . . ." Ahab, by going to war, was not seeking to further the cause of God on the earth. He instead was willfully and rebelliously charging ahead to further his own worldly ambitions, and in the process spread further the worship of Baal to which he had given himself. His was an effort to extend the kingdom of darkness, not that of light. Furthermore, he went forth consciously rejecting the warning of the true prophet of God that such a step would not be blessed by God, but instead would result in Ahab's death. Yet there was righteous Jehoshaphat allied with him and helping in his wicked efforts - ultimately helping him go to his predicted death. Perhaps Ahab would not have gone up at all if it had not been for Jehoshaphat's assistance. Now the Lord mercifully spared Jehoshaphat's life, and He used this battle according to His own sovereign purposes to end Ahab's wickedness on earth and to plunge him into his eternal judgment. But the rebuke still rightly fell on this righteous king for assisting the wicked in a wicked cause.

We should take warning from this, and beware of doing the same. We should beware of so encouraging and aiding the wicked in their wickedness that we actually hasten (as it were) God's judgment upon them, and bring God's wrath upon our own heads in the process. A wife does this when she deceitfully covers for her unconverted husband and even helps him keep up his wicked behavior of using drugs or abusing alcohol or engaging in thievery - all in the name of trying to hang on to her husband. She is also guilty of aiding the wicked in a wicked cause when she gives way to the wicked pressure of her ungodly husband to disobey God in not properly disciplining her children or in neglecting the assembling of herself regularly with God's people. A parent does this when he or she helps support the lawless lifestyle of an adult child out of an unbiblical sentimentality, or refuses to consistently and lovingly deal with the sins of younger children through the use of the rod and rebuke, all out of a fear of "losing them". We may do this in the political realm when we band together with wicked men in the name of furthering a particular course of righteousness we are concerned about (taking back part of Canaan from Gentile idolaters!) but in the process end up aiding others in much more serious wickedness (helping the idolaters already in Canaan in pursuing their sinful lives!). We may also do this in the church by insisting on working together with heretics who are tearing the guts out of the Scriptures in the name of unity and mutual respect.

There is a fourth and final way in which our abhorrence of the wicked should rightly manifest itself. Here we will be pausing longer because of the difficulty and delicacy of the issue. We rightly hate with the hatred of abhorrence in:

DESIRING GOD'S JUST JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED, AND CALLING UPON GOD FOR IT WHERE THERE IS NO REPENTANCE - ESPECIALLY WHERE THERE IS A COURSE OF FLAGRANT, OPEN HOSTILITY AND OPPOSITION TO GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

Here I would direct your attention to Psalm 139:19-22:

¹⁹Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!
Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.

²⁰For they speak against You wickedly;
Your enemies take *Your name* in vain.

²¹Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

²²I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

Here we see again in verse 19b that David rejected the companionship of wicked men. But there is more here. He calls out to the Lord in the first part of the same verse, "O that You would slay the wicked, O God! . . ." Nor is this the only place where we find such language. The Psalmist ended an earlier Psalm describing the glories of God's earth with the words:

May sinners be consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more. (Psalm 104:35a)

We find similar language in imprecatory Psalms such as 35, 58, 69, 83 and 109. (The word "imprecatory" means "earnestly requesting evil or judgment or a curse upon someone".) This imprecatory language is not limited to the Old Testament either, contrary to those who falsely try to paint the "harsh" God of the Old Testament as somehow being different from the "loving" God of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul closed his first epistle to the Corinthians with the words, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. . ." (16:22a) And the souls of the martyred saints under the altar in Rev. 6:10 cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

This biblical data tells us that **those who hate the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence rightly desire that God ultimately judge and repay the wicked for their wickedness.** For after all, in the language of Dabney:

"Righteous retribution is one of the glories of the divine character. If it is right that God should desire to exercise it, then it cannot be wrong for his people to desire him to exercise it."⁽¹¹⁾

Is it not the will and eternal plan of God to judge the wicked who do not repent and believe the Gospel? Will this indeed not take place one day in accordance with the justice and holiness of God? Then we should desire and long for the carrying out of God's good and perfect and holy will on the earth. And **where there are such godly desires in the heart of a true Christian, they will naturally and rightly find expression in prayer to God that He might do His will in judging the wicked and purifying the earth.** Thus Psalm 139:19a is the language of earnest petition to God to do what He purposes to do and will do. And we also, if we would rightly hate the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence, should plead with God that He would judge the wicked.

Now **at this point many professing Christians in our day struggle, and even openly object.** "How unloving", they would react, "to pray to God to judge the wicked!" Yet that is exactly what righteous men do explicitly and repeatedly in the Scriptures. Furthermore, those who confess the name of Christ are probably doing the very same thing, even if unwittingly. They hopefully continually pray as part of the bride along with the Spirit and the Apostle John, ". . . come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:17 & 20). Yet to pray such a prayer includes in it a petition for Christ to judge His enemies and cast them into hell, for that is a major part of what He will do when He comes. Also, professing Christians frequently take the language of the Lord's Prayer upon their lips. Yet what is it they are asking when they pray:

". . . hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven" (Matthew 6:9b-10)?

Consider the words of Johannes Vos:

God's kingdom cannot come without Satan's kingdom being destroyed. God's will cannot be done in earth without the destruction of evil. Evil cannot be destroyed without the destruction of men who are permanently identified with it. Instead of being influenced by the sickly sentimentalism of the present day, Christian people should realize that the glory of God demands the destruction of evil. Instead of being insistent upon the assumed but really non-existent rights of men, they should focus their attention upon the rights of God. Instead of being ashamed of the Imprecatory Psalms, and attempting to apologize for them and explain them away, Christian people should glory in them and not hesitate to use them in the public and private exercises of the worship of God.⁽¹²⁾

However, when we look again at Psalm 139:19-22, we do encounter a further issue. For David obviously was not just praying for the future destruction of the wicked in general. **He evidently had particular individuals around him in view whom he called upon to depart from him, and who had become his enemies.**

Furthermore, when we consider the imprecatory Psalms like 35, 58, 69, 83 and 109, we again see that the Psalmist is praying for God to horribly judge and curse specific individuals who were oppressing him and his fellow countrymen. For example, consider Psalm 109:1-20:

¹Do not keep silent, O God of my praise!
²For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me;
 They have spoken against me with a lying tongue.
³They have also surrounded me with words of hatred,
 And fought against me without a cause.
⁴In return for my love they are my accusers,
 But I *give myself* to prayer.
⁵Thus they have rewarded me evil for good,
 And hatred for my love.
⁶Set a wicked man over him,
 And let an accuser stand at his right hand.
⁷When he is judged, let him be found guilty,
 And let his prayer become sin.
⁸Let his days be few,
 And let another take his office.
⁹Let his children be fatherless,
 And his wife a widow.
¹⁰Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg;
 Let them seek *their bread* also from their desolate places.
¹¹Let the creditor seize all that he has,
 And let strangers plunder his labor.
¹²Let there be none to extend mercy to him,
 Nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children.
¹³Let his posterity be cut off,
 And in the generation following let their name be blotted out.
¹⁴Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD,
 And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.
¹⁵Let them be continually before the LORD,
 That He may cut off the memory of them from the earth;
¹⁶Because he did not remember to show mercy,
 But persecuted the poor and needy man,
 That he might even slay the broken in heart.
¹⁷As he loved cursing, so let it come to him;
 As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him.
¹⁸As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment,
 So let it enter his body like water,
 And like oil into his bones.
¹⁹Let it be to him like the garment which covers him,
 And for a belt with which he girds himself continually.
²⁰Let this *be* the LORD's reward to my accusers,
 And to those who speak evil against my person.

Such strong words raise a legitimate question. Is this to be a pattern for us? Are we to specifically call upon the living God to judge specific wicked men in our day? To get specific, are we to call upon God to cast down and destroy Saddam Hussein, or even an openly wicked leader like President Clinton? Are we to call upon God to curse our personal enemies who offend us? This is no little question and must be answered carefully. In an attempt to do that, notice with me **several observations regarding Psalm 109 in particular, and the imprecatory Psalms (and other imprecations of Scripture) in general:**

1. **The one who wrote these Psalms wrote as a prophet under divine inspiration.** Thus, when he called upon God to curse specific individuals, he was speaking the words of the God who infallibly knows the true spiritual state and ultimate destiny of men. However, we cannot claim such infallible knowledge about our enemies, can we? Since some of the most unlikely of wicked men like the persecuting Apostle Paul have been gloriously converted in the past, and since God is still in the business of saving the most wretched of sinners in our day, we dare not speak this dogmatically in our prayers to God.

2. Although the imprecatory Psalms generally had in view an immediate situation which the Psalmist was facing, **they also were often ultimately the prophetically-foretold language of Jesus Christ regarding his enemies.** For example, Psalm 109:8b is quoted and applied to Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:20. Thus this imprecatory language is often the prophetic description of the very prayers of the coming Messiah who would be God as well as man, and who would be appointed Judge over all men. He, of course, has every right to pray this way.

3. **The imprecations of Scripture** do have reference to individuals who are attacking and harming the speaker, and deliverance from those attacks is being sought. However, these imprecations **are not the attempts of the speaker to take vengeance into his own hands against those who offend him.** They are rather the humble committing in prayer of the matter of vengeance to the living God who has declared, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay". Such a humble posture before the avenging God is clearly evident in Psalm 109:4:

In return for my love they are my accusers,
But I give myself to prayer.

Therefore, in no way do we in such Imprecatory Psalms reflect a righteous man wrongfully taking justice into his own hands. Furthermore:

4. Where we find righteous, imprecatory language in Scripture, **the issue at stake was always higher than that of mere personal offense and resentment.** David did not write as a merely private individual, but as God's anointed king over the Old Covenant people of God, and as a type of his greater seed, the coming Messiah. Thus an attack upon David was ultimately an attack upon the living God and His kingdom. Psalm 83 was spoken against the enemies of God's people, Israel. Psalm 58 contains imprecations against wicked judges who do violence against the righteous people of God. Paul's imprecation in I Corinthians 16 is against those who do not love the Lord. And the plea for vengeance from the souls under the altar in Revelation 6 comes from those martyred for the Word and testimony of Christ. It was ultimately the Kingdom of God and the cause of the Gospel of Christ which were at stake in the righteous imprecations of the Scriptures, and it should be the same for us before we dare take such language upon our lips.

5. **Those against whom the imprecations were spoken were** not every person who was an unbeliever at that time, but rather **those who had become open enemies of God and His people, violently and viciously attacking and assaulting them out of hatred for God.** If you remember, Psalm 139:19 was directed against men of bloodshed who wickedly speak against God and who rise up against God. The imprecations of Psalm 109 were spoken against those who attacked David with lying and deceitful words of hatred, who fought against him without cause (verses 2-3), and who persecuted the afflicted and needy man and the despondent in heart, to put them to death (verse 16). Thus, if a more specific prayer of imprecation is ever to be taken up by our lips, it should be spoken only against those who are flagrantly and violently opponents of God and His people.

6. Finally, **even the divinely-inspired imprecations in the Psalms evidently are not totally divorced from a desire to see wicked men cease to be wicked through repentance and faith in God.** Observe Psalm 83:13-18:

¹³O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like the chaff before the wind!
¹⁴As the fire burns the woods,
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,
¹⁵So pursue them with Your tempest,
And frighten them with Your storm.
¹⁶Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.
¹⁷Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;
Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,
¹⁸That *men* may know that You, whose name alone *is* the LORD,
Are the Most High over all the earth.

Especially notice verse 16. Although various interpretations have been suggested for this verse, the simplest and most straightforward understanding is that one reason why Asaph prayed this prayer for God's judgment upon Israel's enemies was that they might in this way be caused to seek the name of the LORD. However, if they still remained impenitent, the Psalmist goes on in the next verse to pray that they might be ashamed and dismayed

forever, and might perish. But even in the midst of the imprecatory language, a desire for the eternal salvation of the wicked objects of this prayer was expressed. For that also was a way in which wickedness and the wicked could be removed from the earth, and it is the only method in which the Lord's heart has true pleasure and delight.

With these observations regarding the imprecatory language of Scripture before us, what should we conclude about our own practice? Is it ever proper to pray such imprecatory prayers regarding specific individuals?

I do not believe that we can totally rule out prayers of imprecation with regard to specific individuals in light of the general evidence of Scripture. However, if they are prayed, the following must be true in order to reflect the mind and will of the God to whom we pray:

1. They must be preceded by the prayer that God would save the one for whom we pray as our first desire, if it be His will, since we do not know whom He yet may save. We must never forget that we presently live in the age of graciously offered salvation, not the age of consummate judgment (John 3:17). Therefore, first priority in our prayers should be salvation, not judgment.
2. But also, when we pray imprecatory prayers, they must be prayed with a humble and submissive spirit of committing our cause to God to avenge as He sees fit.
3. They must only be prayed where the cause of God's Kingdom and of the Gospel is at stake, and not some petty personal matter (like a person cutting in on us in traffic, or cheating us in a business deal).
4. They must only be prayed against men who are openly, viciously and violently attacking the righteous and their God, and not regarding every lost sinner.

During my own lifetime I have prayed such an imprecatory prayer and have seen God answer it in an amazing fashion. When I was a boy the cold war was on and the Soviet Union was clearly "an evil empire". She was ruled by Communists who held to an openly anti-God philosophy. The Soviet leaders killed and imprisoned many faithful servants of Christ for their faith. They had also ruthlessly established a vast Communist empire, and threatened to conquer and dominate other countries in the same way including the United States. During that period of tension, I at various times prayed that the Lord would save the leader of the Soviet Union, but if He was not so pleased, that He would bring him down in judgment. The years have passed. The Soviet leaders of that era are in their graves, and unless they repented, are experiencing the eternal torment of God for the way they treated the Lord and His people. Furthermore, the Communist system in the former Soviet Union has collapsed (although there still are threats) and the empire has largely disintegrated. The Lord has amazingly answered that imprecatory prayer.

In conclusion, these then are four ways in which the Scriptures indicate we should hate the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence. We should truly abhor them, avoid close companionship and friendship with them, refuse to assist them in their wicked course, and desire and pray generally (and at times specifically) for God's ultimate judgment of them if there is not repentance. These all are clearly our duty. However, no other responses should be followed unless they are likewise commanded in Scripture or we may stray into ungodly loathing and hatred - a concern to which we will return later in this study.

Having considered how we should express an abhorring hatred of the wicked, notice its opposite as we come to:

CHAPTER FIVE - HOW DO WE SHOW DELIGHTING LOVE?

The commanded conditional love of delight toward the righteous is also to be expressed in at least four ways. First of all, when we are loving in this way, there will be, most obviously:

A HEART DELIGHTING IN OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE LORD.

Consider again the words of Psalm 16:2-3:

²*O my soul, you have said to the LORD,*
 `You are my Lord,
 My goodness is nothing apart from You' -
³*And to the saints who are on the earth,*

'They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.'

If we are responding aright, the godly in a real sense will be the joy of our hearts second only to the Lord. We will view them, warts and all, in a positive way which is truly pleased with them, and happy with regard to them. Although again the illustration is very limited, our response to the righteous will be somewhat parallel to our response as a hungry person to those leftovers of a scrumptious Italian dish which gets better with time after they have been heated in the microwave and attractively served up. We will delight in them. There will first of all be a right heart perspective toward our brothers and sisters in Christ where this love of delight exists.

But closely-related, if we truly delight in the saints with a love of delight, we will respond to them with:

REAL PERSONAL ACCEPTANCE.

In other words, we will gladly welcome them in an intimate way into our lives and hearts. Now on what basis do I say this?

First of all, because, as we've seen, the opposite of the love of delight - the hatred of abhorrence - expresses itself in the rejection of the wicked as far as making them our closest friends and associates is concerned. Thus it stands to reason that in contrast, the love of delight would accept its objects - the righteous - into an intimacy of relationship. But there is more explicit basis for this conclusion.

If you remember, we briefly observed before that the idea of delighting in someone or being pleased with him is closely bound up with the idea of personal acceptance in some of the key relevant words found in our Bibles. Furthermore, the example of the love of delight of God the Father and of His Son Jesus Christ toward men is especially applicable for us at this point. Consider again the words of John 14:21-23:

²¹'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.' ²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?' ²³Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'

How does Christ indicate that He and His Father will express their delight in those who love them? By revealing Himself to the objects of His love, by coming to them and dwelling with them along with His Father, and (according to John 16:26-27) by opening personal access to the Father. The Lord Jesus indicates that He wants to be with, and have intimate communion with those in whom He delights.

This pattern set by our Lord is one which we should follow in our relations with those who truly love Christ and the Father as well. The love of delight involves an acceptance of our brothers and sisters in Christ which includes our seeking and allowing a closeness and intimacy of relationship with them which is not present where this love is not found. We willingly and gladly welcome them into our hearts and lives - especially those with whom we providentially have the most contact - in an intimate way not true of our relationships with lost men around us. In other words, our closest friends and associates should be Christians if we are responding aright.

Furthermore, it is wrong to remain distant and aloof from other brethren in Christ, for whatever reason. Our more introvertish personality is no excuse at this point. Christian love for our brethren demands that we let down the barriers of our own hearts toward others and extend ourselves to the children of God around us. For some of us this may be more difficult for a number of possible reasons. Pain and grief received from having opened our hearts to our brethren in the past may tempt us to avoid making ourselves vulnerable again. Basic selfishness and self-centeredness are too often factors. But we are not thus absolved from opening our hearts and lives to our brethren. Do it we must.

There is also a third expression of this delighting love:

AN HONORING OF THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD.

This manifestation is brought out in Psalm 15:1-2a; 4a&b:

¹LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?

Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

²He . . .

⁴In whose eyes a vile person is despise,

But he honors those who fear the LORD; . . .

Observe here the parallel, contrasting language in verse 4a&b. The opposite of a despising of a vile person is the honoring of one who fears the LORD. In other words, the love of delight for the righteous seeks to exalt them and hold them up in the esteem of others, not tear them down with our tongues and attitudes. We will carefully seek to avoid speaking ill of God's people unless our duty before God absolutely requires it, and then only with grief and regret that such matters have to be mentioned. We will be quick to speak good regarding those who fear God, and in other ways honor and show respect for them, all because we are delighting in them and accepting them in our hearts. For no other response is possible where the love of delight is present. If we truly delight in someone, we want them to be exalted.

There is a fourth and final expression of the love of delight indicated in the Word of God. Where it is present there will be:

A SPECIAL, SACRIFICIAL MEETING OF THE NEEDS OF THE SAINTS THROUGH DEEDS OF KINDNESS.

Listen to the inspired command of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:10:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

While, as we have already seen, even the ungodly are to receive kindness from our hands, the godly especially are to be the priority objects of our practical deeds of love. Why? Because we delight in them and therefore especially desire their good.

Furthermore, our practical love to the righteous is to be sacrificial love. Remember the words of 1 John 3:16-18:

¹⁶By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Here, as we have seen, love to our brethren in Christ is specifically commanded in contrast to the wicked world's hatred of them (compare verses 11-15). And notice, Christ's laying down of His own life is to be the pattern for our own practical expressions of love to our brethren. We are to give of ourselves and of our possessions in accordance with our knowledge of the need and in accordance with our own ability to do so. But such giving should be with a spirit of self-denial which extends ourselves to others till it hurts and pinches our flesh. We are to lay down our lives for our brethren in practical ways - in deed and truth. In this way we love them with a love of delight.

These then are four ways we are to love our brethren with a love of delight. We are to indeed delight in them from the heart, accept them into personal intimacy of relationship with us, honor them, and especially assist them in their needs practically and sacrificially. Before we press on, I would simply pause to ask a pointed and necessary question.

Is what we have seen a basic description of the heart attitudes and actions of yourself? If so, you bear the marks of a true child of God - of one who is delighting in the Lord as we have been commanded to do, for this is how He responds. If not, it is an strong indicator that all is not well with your heart, and that you likely do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior at all. For those of us who to some degree do manifest these marks of a true believer, we are called to redouble our efforts to carry out the will of our Lord at this point, are we not?

Having sought to summarize the ways in which we are to love the righteous with a love of delight, and to hate

the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence, we come to a third and final positive practical guideline regarding this duty:

CHAPTER SIX - WHAT SHOULD MOTIVATE US?

We yet need to deal with **the "why"** of conditional love and hatred. If we would rightly love and hate conditionally, **our responses must be stimulated and stirred by the proper spiritual motivations.** Love and hatred are two very powerful, volatile and potentially dangerous emotions in the hearts of sinful human beings. Even true Christians have remaining sin in their hearts which can twist and pervert these emotions of hatred and love. Furthermore, the second and great commandment is to love **all** of our neighbors as ourselves, and we are told elsewhere in God's Word that hating someone is a violation of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". There is a wicked hatred which should never be felt and displayed toward my neighbor whether he be righteous or wicked, and there is a righteous love which is to be shown all men.

Therefore, when we start talking about the duty of loving some men with a love of delight, and hating others with a hatred of abhorrence, we should feel sharply an apparent tension, and should recognize that at this point we face real dangers on the right hand and the left as we seek to obey this aspect of the will of God. How can we sort this all out? How can we be sure that both our love and our hatred are righteous and not wicked?

Perhaps the ultimate key is to understand rightly that which should rightly provoke this love and hatred. What is it that should make the Christian's heart skip with this love of delight, and what is it that should make the Christian's heart recoil and wretch with this hatred of abhorrence? In a real sense we have been assuming the answers to these questions all along, and will to some degree be overlapping with what we have already studied. But this issue of the right motivations for the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence is too vital to pass by without focusing upon it in an explicit way. In a real sense it unlocks all that we have yet to study under practical guidelines for expressing this love and hatred. For there are many other possible motivations for love and hatred than those which are the right and biblical ones.

We will seek to open up four aspects of the proper biblical motivations for the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence. First of all:

THEIR GENERAL CATEGORIES.

What are the categories of motivations which should bring us to responses of delighting love and loathing hatred? There are at least three which may be drawn from the biblical descriptions of those who are to be loved with a love of delight, and to be hated with a hatred of abhorrence:

1. Consider in the first place the words of 1 John 4:21-5:1:

^{4:21}And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

^{5:1}Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

What is it that should drive me as a Christian to love another Christian (instead of hating him as the world does)?

It is because he is the spiritual child of my beloved heavenly Father. He has been begotten by God the Father in spiritual regeneration, is therefore precious to God, and thus should likewise be precious to me. For I too am a child of God, and the person in view is my spiritual brother (4:21). We are part of the same spiritual family. We are related to each other because we are both children of our heavenly Father, and therefore we should delight in one another. In other words, John here points to **the motivation of relationship** which should cause us to love our brother in Christ with a love of delight.

In contrast, what was it in Psalm 139 which caused David to hate others with the utmost hatred of abhorrence? Observe verses 20 & 22:

²⁰For they speak against You wickedly;

Your enemies take *Your name* in vain.

²²I hate them with perfect hatred;

I count them my enemies.

One reason or motivation was the fact that these individuals were open enemies of God (verse 20). Since they were God's enemies, David made them his own enemies as well (verse 22). In other words, David so identified himself with the Lord because of His personal relationship with Him that he responded to other men in accordance with their relationship to God. He hated God's enemies as his own enemies, and loved God's children as his spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. He was taking God's side in the great conflict between the kingdom of darkness and of light, and so should we.

But there is a second, closely-related category of motivation as well:

2. **The motivation of affection.** Observe this motivation in Psalm 139:21-22:

²¹Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?
²²I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

Why did David hate these men with a hatred of abhorrence? Because they hated Jehovah - the God who had made him (verses 13-16) and faithfully remained present with him (verse 18). The response of hatred in his heart was but the reasonable and godly response to the wicked hatred which God's (and his) enemies had for God. For such a response was but to imitate God's own response to such men. Here David again was so closely identifying himself with the living God in whom he delighted that he loathingly hated with the utmost hatred those who dared to hate his God. In contrast, it was at this point that godly Jehoshaphat sinned and brought the wrath of God upon his head because he loved with a love of delight those who hate the LORD (II Chronicles 19:2).

On the other hand, we find that Christ's love of delight is a response to the love of His people for Him. Remember the words of John 14:21:

'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.'

It is those who love Christ who experience Christ's responsive delighting love. Those same individuals should be the objects of our delighting love as we imitate our Savior.

In conclusion, a proper and biblical motivation of our delighting love and abhorring hatred is the affections of others shown toward God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Our hearts should respond with a love of delight toward those who love the God in whom we delight, and a hatred of abhorrence toward those who hate Jesus Christ. In this way we take God's side and stand with Him instead of rising up against Him (Psalm 139:21b). There is a third and final category of motivation for delighting love and abhorring hatred which again is closely-related to the first two. It is:

3. **The motivation of obedience.** When we consider the predominant emphasis of the descriptions of those we are to love and hate, we find that it is upon the moral, ethical behavior and character of those individuals. It is their moral, ethical behavior and character which properly constrains us to respond with either a love of delight or a hatred of abhorrence. Briefly notice some examples of this:

Remember David's description of those he hated in Psalm 139:19-20:

¹⁹Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!
Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.
²⁰For they speak against You wickedly;
Your enemies take *Your name* in vain.

In 2 Chronicles 19:2, Jehoshaphat was rebuked for helping and loving **the wicked**. In Psalm 119:158, the Psalmist declared that he loathed the treacherous "**Because they do not keep Your word**".

On the other hand, as we saw earlier, David delighted in **the saints** or **holy ones** who are on the earth (Psalm 16:3). The Lord as our great example of delighting love is described as loving "**him who follows righteousness**" (Proverbs 15:9) and "**He who has . . . (His) commandments and keeps them**" (John 14:21a).

What is it that should make my heart leap with the love of delight and pleasure in a fellow human being? It is a general pattern of life of obeying the law of God and walking more and more in the likeness of a holy God to which he is being conformed. And what is it which should make my heart wretch and vomit as it were with an abominating hatred? It is a life of wicked rebellion against the commandments of my God. **Righteousness and holiness on the one hand, and sin and wickedness on the other hand should be the most prominent of motivators behind a love of delight and a hatred of abhorrence, respectively. This is because they receive the most emphasis in Scripture, and are most visible. Furthermore, they are the proof, as it were, of the affections toward God and of the relationship with God which are also biblical motivations.** For those who truly love God prove it by keeping Christ's commandments. And those who are begotten of God have been regenerated and made new creatures who keep God's law.

These then are the three categories of biblical motivation to delighting love and loathing hatred - those of relationship with God, affection toward God, and obedience to God. They are all spiritual motivations. They all ultimately have to do with the living God and how men are related to and respond to Him and His cause in the earth - not ultimately with how men treat me and wrong me. In other words, these motivations are active in one who has planted his flag and taken the side of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. But notice secondly:

THEIR PERSONAL FOCUS.

These motivations all have reference to a person - a person who is either loved or hated. Obviously, **it is a person** who is either in God's family, or his enemy. And **it is a person** who either loves or hates the Lord. However, when it comes to the most prominent motivation of moral, ethical behavior and character, its personal nature has been disputed when it comes to the matter of hating wicked people. As we have noted before, it is very common for evangelical Christians to declare that we are to hate the sin but love the lost sinner. There is an element of truth in this statement in that we are to have a general love for all men including wicked men. However, as we have seen, the Bible also makes it clear that there is a close connection between the sinner and sin which does not allow the typical distinction between them to be made in an unqualified way. Notice with me two passages which make this connection abundantly clear: First, consider Psalm 5:4-6:

⁴For You *are* not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,
Nor shall evil dwell with You.
⁵The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;
You hate all workers of iniquity.
⁶You shall destroy those who speak falsehood;
The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Verse 4 makes it clear that the LORD hates sin. But verses 5-6 also make it abundantly clear that God hates the sinner.

Notice a second passage - Proverbs 6:16-19:

¹⁶These six *things* the LORD hates,
Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him:
¹⁷A proud look,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent blood,
¹⁸A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that are swift in running to evil,
¹⁹A false witness *who* speaks lies,
And one who sows discord among brethren.

Here the connection between the sin and the sinner is made in the closest possible way. According to this text, God clearly hates the sins of pride, lying, murder and divisiveness. But He connects those sins with the relevant body parts which a person uses to commit them before concluding with more specific reference to the sinner as the object of His hatred in verse 19.

From these passages and many others we learn that **in God's eyes there is a close, seemingly unbreakable connection between wicked deeds and the one who commits them - between the sin and the sinner.** For after all, there is never a sin unless a person disobeys the commandments of God. You cannot treat sin as if it is somehow abstract from the one who commits it - putting it off on a shelf in the corner by itself. As further proof of this fact, the reality is that, apart from divine intervention, the judgment and repayment of God's violated law falls firmly on the head of the one who violated it.

In other words, it is impossible to hate the sin without also hating the lost sinner with a hatred of abhorrence. Thus the predominant motivation to a hatred of abhorrence has as its focus the wicked person and not just his wicked deeds.

Having now seen the general categories and personal focus of the proper biblical motivations for the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence, notice in the third place:

SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES.

At this point I will be focusing specifically upon some of the biblical examples of wicked behavior by wicked men which should stimulate the response in our hearts of a hatred of abhorrence toward them. What exactly is it in men's behavior which should cause our spiritual stomachs to revolt and wretch with abhorrence when we see it? For it is possible for us to talk in generalities and never confront practically what we are talking about. We are helped greatly in this matter by the many references to specific sins in the Bible as being **an abomination** to a holy God. Remember again the words of Proverbs 6:16:

These six *things* the LORD hates,
Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him:

Here the poetic parallelism of the Hebrew language tells us that that which God abominates is that which he hates. These words are synonyms - having the same basic meaning. What sins then are an abomination to the Lord? Let's seek to briefly list several:

1. **Pride** (Proverbs 6:17a). "A proud look", or more literally, "haughty eyes".
2. **Lying** (Proverbs 6:17b). "A lying tongue" - deceiving others contrary to the truth.
3. **Murder** (Proverbs 6:17c). "Hands that shed innocent blood".
4. **Causing strife and division among brethren** (Proverbs 6:19b).
5. **Homosexuality.** Consider the inspired words of Leviticus 18:22:
You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It *is* an abomination.
The reason why we should and do hate homosexuals with a hatred of loathing is not because we are somehow homophobic or narrowly biased toward a more traditional sexual orientation. It's because such sin is an abomination in the eyes of God. But notice - so also are pride, lying, murder, etc.
6. **Idolatry or worshipping other gods** (Deuteronomy 7:24-25).
7. **Murdering one's sons and daughters as part of idolatrous worship.** Here observe what is written in Deuteronomy 12:31:

You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

The present day practice of sacrificing our unborn sons and daughters to our idols of lust and self-gratification and selfishness in abortion is no less such an abomination to God.
8. **Functioning as a medium or spiritist** (Deuteronomy 18:11-12).
9. **Oppressing the weak and unprotected** like the stranger, the orphan and the widow (Jeremiah 7:6 & 10).

10. **Stealing** (Jeremiah 7:9-10).
11. **Committing adultery** (Jeremiah 7:9-10). Notice that heterosexual immorality is not absent in this list of abominations which also contains homosexuality. Such heterosexually immoral abominations include marrying again a divorced spouse after a subsequent marriage has intervened (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).
12. **Mixed marriages** between followers of Jehovah and idolaters (Malachi 2:11).
13. **The religious exercises of the wicked** (Proverbs 15:8-9; 21:27; 28:9). These include their sacrifices and prayers.

All of these sins and more are an abomination to the Lord and should cause us to be repulsed by them and by those who practice them.

Having considered the general categories, personal focus, and specific examples of the biblical motivations behind the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence, consider finally with me:

THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

Here I would direct you to three applications (although there is yet much more which flows from what we have seen):

1. **You must first of all know God, and love and delight in God, and keep His Word, or you never can properly love others with a love of delight, and properly hate others with a hatred of abhorrence.** For the motivations to this biblical love and hatred are based upon and assume such a relationship, attitude and activity. How can you love God's children and hate His enemies if you are His enemy. How can you love those who love God and hate those who hate God if you don't love God and instead hate Him? How can you delight in those who obey God's law and abhor those who wickedly snub their noses at it when you likewise are despising and violating the commandments of the God of heaven? You can't. It's impossible to do so.

2. **We see a major reason why many Christians struggle with this concept of the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence.** And we see why so often we and others have a problem properly loving the righteous and hating the wicked. It is because we do not rightly and fully abominate wickedness and delight in righteousness. It is because we so weakly hate sin and so little love God and His law. (And ironically, here is also why we so poorly **love** the wicked as we ought to as well when it comes to declaring the Gospel to them!) The problem is not that God or biblical Christians are too harsh and unloving. The problem is that so many of us so often do not really take God's side and stand by Him, and view man's behavior and character as God does. Remember part of the quote by Johannes Vos which was mentioned earlier:

Instead of being influenced by the sickly sentimentalism of the present day, Christian people should realize that the glory of God demands the destruction of evil. Instead of being insistent upon the assumed but really non-existent, rights of men, they should focus their attention upon the rights of God⁽¹³⁾

But how do we strengthen **a holy love of delight in righteousness and righteous men, and a holy hatred of revulsion toward wickedness and wicked men?** Let's answer that by considering **what it is which undermines them** in the first place. These undermining influences include:

a. **The careless neglect of our relationship with the living God.** Prayer and the reading of His Word is crucial to the maintenance and cultivation of our relationship with Him. If we neglect them, we are failing to delight ourselves in the Lord as we are commanded to do, and there will be an undermining of a biblical love of delight and hatred of abhorrence.

b. **The treating lightly of sin in our own hearts and lives.** How do we do this? By excusing sin, explaining it away, viewing supposed good intentions and sincerity as being good enough, arguing that others have wronged me and thus God can't rightly blame me for responding the way I do. We treat sin lightly by not going after the

taproots of that sin in my life.

c. **A careless and mindless exposure of ourselves to modern media** (TV, popular music, books, magazines and videos, etc.). Listen to the wise observations of one Christian writer about such media:

‘The usual tendency of these works is to familiarize the reader (or listener) to viewing, without revulsion (and often, I might add, with laughter) . . . the characters of duelists, drunkards, seducers, and other villains.’ Thus modern Christians are still opposed to the fornication going on next door, but they are no longer outraged and scandalized by it, as they would have been fifty years ago. The reason for this lack of outrage can be found in the searing effects of godless entertainment on the conscience, when mindlessly taken in. The subtle didactic lie has been - ‘you may still believe that these things are wrong *for you*, but you may no longer believe them to be a big deal, and under no circumstances may you impose your morality on others.’ *Yessir*, we all say.⁽¹⁴⁾

Continual careless and mindless exposure to the filth in modern media is a sure recipe to dull and deaden a Christian's sense of abhorrence toward wickedness and wicked men, and of delight toward righteousness and righteous men.

d. Finally, **a failure to keep the cross constantly before us in its true light** contributes to this problem. Do you want to see how hateful and abhorrent and abominable sin and sinners are? Look at the cross, which leads us to a third and final application:

3. **We should stand amazed at the gracious way in which the Lord Jesus has broken the seemingly unbreakable bond between the sinner and his sin.** How is it that He has done it? By becoming sin in the elect sinner's place. By bearing the abhorrence and revulsion of God on His own head which was so richly deserved by that sinner. If I am a saint, all that I have done and will do which is an abomination to God He took upon Himself on the cross. Upon the exercise of faith in Him, all of His righteous and merit is credited to me. What an astounding act by a just and holy God. Who would not love and trust and serve Him? Why do some of you not do so?

So far we have considered practical guidelines for exercising a conditional love of delight and its opposite which tell us what this biblical duty means positively. But what we have seen still leaves us with some unanswered questions. In order to address those remaining questions, we yet need to consider several things which the conditional love of delight and the conditional hatred of abhorrence do not mean by way of qualification. First of all, we will take up:

CHAPTER SEVEN - A MATTER OF DEGREES

Does a conditional love of delight (and its opposite hatred of abhorrence) mean **that our responses to each member within each of the two major divisions of mankind must be totally uniform**? We earlier established the fact that there is a great chasm between the two groups of mankind who are to receive the contrasting responses of delighting love and abhorring hatred. The righteous children of God are to be the objects of our delight. The wicked enemies of God are to be the objects of our abhorrence. Does this mean that all who do not know the Lord are to at all times equally be the objects of our abhorrence, and that all the saints of God are to at all times equally be the objects of our delighting love? The Word of God answers that question with a definite "no". Let's consider the evidence on both sides of the issue. First, notice the biblical evidence that:

THERE ARE RIGHTLY DEGREES OF DELIGHTING LOVE FOR THE SAINTS:

1. **The Lord Jesus apparently delighted in His faithful followers to varying degrees.** Observe one evidence of this in John 11:1-5 (especially verses 3 & 5):

¹Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, **he whom You love** is sick.’

⁴When Jesus heard *that*, He said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ ⁵Now **Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.**

We might read these verses and quickly pass by them if it were not for a couple of facts which cannot be

avoided. First of all, except for one specific disciple of the inner circle of the twelve (whom we will note in a moment), no other faithful followers of Jesus while He was upon the earth were specifically, individually labeled as being ones whom He loved. John here is obviously taking special care to underscore the fact that Jesus especially loved these two sisters and their brother.

This understanding of a special love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus is further demonstrated by the fact that Jesus was repeatedly found present with them. He was a guest in their house the time when Martha was busy serving while Mary sat at His feet (Luke 10:38-42). In John 11, His interaction with Mary and Martha leading up to the resurrection of Lazarus evidenced a close and intimate relationship with them. Later they were all present with Jesus at another house in Bethany when Mary anointed Jesus for His burial, which was a very personal action of a close friend and acquaintance (John 12:1-8). And it is hard to believe that the fact that Jesus stayed overnight outside Jerusalem at Bethany during the week before His crucifixion was unrelated to the reality that these three persons were present in that town (Matthew 21:17). In other words, the Lord Jesus evidently especially delighted with a love of delight in these three individuals among all His faithful followers.

But consider further evidence of different degrees of Christ's love of delight as repeatedly recorded in John 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2a; 21:7a & 20:

^{13:23}Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, **whom Jesus loved**.

^{19:26}When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple **whom He loved** standing by, He said to His mother, `Woman, behold your son!' ²⁷Then He said to the disciple, `Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home*.

^{20:2}Then she (Mary Magdalene) ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, **whom Jesus loved** . . .

^{21:7}Therefore that disciple **whom Jesus loved** said to Peter, `It is the Lord!' . . .

^{21:20}Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple **whom Jesus loved** following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, `Lord, who is the one who betrays You?'

In these five passages, one of the twelve disciples who remains unnamed is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. It is almost certain that this disciple was the human author of this Gospel - the Apostle John. (Compare John 21:20-24.) And it is striking that only he of all twelve disciples is described in this affectionate way, even though the Lord certainly delighted in all eleven faithful disciples with a love of delight. What does this fact tell us? It apparently indicates that John was especially the object of the delighting love of the Lord Jesus, to a degree not true of the rest of the Twelve. This is underscored by the fact that it was apparently this disciple alone who had the special privilege of reclining on Jesus' breast at the last supper before Jesus was crucified, and it was this disciple alone who was singled out to care for Jesus' bereaved Mother at the cross.

How are we to explain the fact that there was this variation in the degree of Christ's delighting love for His followers so that He delighted more in Mary and Martha and Lazarus and John than in others? Some might say that they were Jesus' special friends - that He felt most comfortable with them, perhaps because their personalities meshed so well. It is evidently true that they were Jesus' closest friends, but remember that Jesus was the perfect man with the perfect balance of human personality. Why the closer bond with these particular individuals? I believe that it is right to conclude that **the spotlessly pure Son of God was most drawn to delightingly love these special persons and to cultivate the closest of pure relationships with them because they most closely reflected His own holy character, and most warmly and earnestly loved Him and His Father**. Remember, it was Mary, and Mary alone, who believingly anointed Jesus for His burial. And it was John and only one other disciple who hastened to the tomb on resurrection morning. **In other words, there was greater love of delight where there was present in its object more of that which rightly motivates it - love for and obedience toward God. All saints are children of God, but not all equally love and obey Him**. This then is the first argument for varying degrees of a love of delight in God's people - the example of our Lord toward His faithful followers. A second is gleaned from the fact that:

2. Paul declared two possible alternative responses to the Corinthians who were responding with carnality. Observe this in 1 Corinthians 4:14-21 (especially verses 14 & 21):

¹⁴I do not write these things to shame you, but **as my beloved children** I warn you. ¹⁵For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. ¹⁶Therefore I urge you, imitate me. ¹⁷For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. ¹⁸Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. ²⁰For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power. ²¹What do you want? **Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?**

What is Paul talking about here in verse 21 when he contrasts love with the rod? Does he mean to say that his use of the rod of church discipline as an Apostle and spiritual father of these Corinthians would not be a loving act? Is he saying that love is always sweet and gentle and soft-spoken, and that the "harsh" action of exercising proper church discipline or chastening toward an impenitent church member would be an unloving act? This cannot be his meaning for at least two reasons:

- a. Paul himself has just declared in verse 14 that he is dealing with them from the motivation of love for them. Thus he would be contradicting himself in a short space if he meant that the use of the rod was not a loving act.
- b. Furthermore, since Paul is in this text using the figurative language of a spiritual father dealing with his spiritual children, it is proper to consider those Scriptural passages dealing with biblical child discipline. In one such passage, Proverbs 13:24, the use of the rod of discipline is clearly declared to be an act of love:

He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

It is an act of love to properly discipline your son when he disobeys. So also must be the act of exercising biblical church discipline.

So what does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 4:21 when he contrasts love with the rod of church discipline. Grosheide is helpful. He writes:

The word *love*, however, must be understood in a special sense. It is not love in general but the utterance, or the expression of love . . . In other words, Paul always possessed love but he might come in such a way that the Corinthians would think that he did not have any love.⁽¹⁵⁾

Or in the words of Calvin, ". . . love is hidden when severe discipline is used . . ." ⁽¹⁶⁾ You see, when a spiritual father comes wearing a frown to rebuke, and to, as needed and appropriate, discipline sin in your life, he does not look like he is delighting in you with a love of delight at the time, does he? No, even as an earthly father does not look like he delightingly loves his child when he must give him or her a spanking.

However, not only does the chastening spiritual father not look like he is delightingly loving the one he chastens. He obviously cannot be delighting in the impenitent child of God at that time with the same degree of delight as when that child is dealing righteously and honestly with his sin. That's why he is frowning instead of smiling. At that time there is a lesser level of the love of delight in his soul toward that spiritual child of God, although he still delights in him because he is a child of God. There are therefore degrees in the love of delight toward the righteous.

From these two lines of evidence - Christ's special love for certain of his faithful disciples, and from Paul's alternatives presented to the Corinthian believers - I believe it is proper to conclude that there may rightly be different degrees of delighting love expressed toward different believers, and even toward the same believers at different times depending upon the degree of their love toward and obedience of Christ. But this is not all, for the Word of God appears to also teach that:

THERE ARE RIGHTLY DEGREES OF ABHORRING HATRED FOR THE WICKED.

Such a distinction appears to be hinted at in **the descriptions of those whom God and whom righteous men hate with a hatred of abhorrence**. One example is Psalm 15:1 & 4a where the one despised is described as a vile or reprobate or rejected one - evidently a reference to one who has **fully been given over** by God to his lusts and wickedness (Romans 1:18-32).

However, the basis for a distinction of degrees in our abhorrence of the wicked is most clear when we come to the Imprecatory Psalms. If you remember, earlier in this study we noted that one way in which we should express our abhorrent hatred of the wicked is by desiring and even praying for God's judgement upon them if they did not repent. We considered in more detail the Imprecatory Psalms which often call upon the Lord to severely judge and destroy specific wicked men. However, at that time we noted that such **imprecatory prayers directed toward specific individuals evidently were reserved only for the most violent and open enemies of the living God who in flagrant ways sought to attack His kingdom and people** (as in the case of Judas Iscariot). In this we were recognizing what I believe is **a biblical distinction of different degrees of the hatred of abhorrence toward the wicked depending upon the degree of the open enmity and flagrant rebellion of that person toward God.**

Now, if we have rightly understood the biblical data, **why is it that we rightly may delight in some Christians more than others, and despise some wicked men more than others?** The answer is found in the biblical motivations for our responses which we have already studied. **Since the motivation for the love of delight and the hatred of abhorrence is a man's relationship to God, his affections toward God, and his obedience of God, it stands to reason that where there is more holiness and love for God in a child of God, there will be more holy delighting love toward him. And where there is more open and heinous and continual wickedness and perversity in an enemy of God, there will be more holy abhorring hatred of him.** The great dividing line between the two great groups of mankind - the children of God and the enemies of God - still regulates our overall responses. But there will also be degrees in those responses depending upon the degree of righteousness or wickedness found in the individual.

1. **This means that we will naturally, if we are carefully seeking to follow and obey the Lord ourselves, have a greater hatred of abhorrence toward a murdering Saddam Hussein, or toward the practicing abortionist with blood on his hands, or toward a promiscuous homosexual deceitfully scattering the AIDs virus among his multiplied partners including younger boys, than we will toward the unsaved neighbor down the street who goes each Sunday to an apostate Roman Catholic church, is faithful to his wife, spends lots of time with his children, works hard to support himself and is outwardly a moral guy. It is not wrong to so respond with degrees of abhorrence.** It righteous to so respond.

2. Likewise, this means that **we will naturally, if we are godly ourselves, delight more with a love of delight in the more serious, consistently holy Christian, than in the professing child of God who always seems to be walking as close to the cliff of apostasy and destruction as possible through an at best inconsistent Christian life.** It is a sad reality that none of us have a perfectly complete and balanced humanity like Christ did, and therefore certain personalities will get along better than others without regard to grace and godliness. Also, our own remaining sin as Christians may sadly at times make us feel more comfortable around those at a lower level of godliness like ourselves, than those at a higher level of godliness than ourselves. However, when we are responding like our Lord, we will most delight in and want to be around and honor and help those who are most like the Savior.

3. Furthermore, **there is another application regarding the reality of possibly varying degrees of the love of delight toward the same person at different times. Although we may (and should) still delight to some degree in one who is in the judgment of charity a child of God with a serious area of sin in his life which he has not yet faced squarely and dealt with in genuine repentance, we will not be able to wear the smile of delight toward him while he remains unwilling to deal with the sin.**

For example, a Christian wife with a professing Christian husband should delight in what she sees of a renewed image of her Savior in her husband. And she certainly should not try to use the rod of discipline against him like Paul threatened against the Corinthians, for she does not have the authority to do so (although she may have to eventually bring sinful behavior to the church for possible discipline if they are both members and her husband will not deal with his sin). However, when there is a glaring area of sin in the life of her husband with which he is not dealing, she will at times not be able to wear the smile of delight toward him in her interaction with him. There will be an awful tension between the supposed relationship with God and the present conduct toward God's law.

The same will be true of a Christian child's relationship toward a impenitent Christian parent, or in any other possible relationships between professing Christians in this world.

We have now studied the first element of **what the biblical duties of delighting love and abhorring evil do not mean**. They do not mean **that our responses to each member within each of the two major divisions of mankind must be totally uniform**. There may legitimately be degrees in both responses.

But now, we come to consider a second element of what these duties do not mean. They do not mean that all loathing or hatred is righteous and proper, and thus we need to focus upon:

CHAPTER EIGHT - WICKED FORMS OF LOATHING HATRED

The Word of God in 1 John 3:15 indicates that there is a wicked hatred which is a violation of the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder". Therefore, it is obvious that we had better use great care to make sure that our hatred of abhorrence toward men is godly hatred and not wicked hatred which will lead to the hell of fire (Matthew 5:21-22). How can we tell the difference? The Word of God has not left us without answers. **Most obviously, it is wicked to hate God's people because they are His children and righteous** (which is the opposite of a godly, abhorrent hatred of the wicked). Cain, as described in 1 John 3:11-13, is a prominent example of this response of wicked men.

But there are other forms of wicked hatred which we may not see as obviously:

RACIAL, NATIONAL LOATHING.

This form of loathing is manifested in Genesis 43:32:

So they set him (Joseph) a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because **the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.**

The Egyptians considered eating with a Hebrew to be an abomination. Here was racial, national prejudice in action. One group of men were considered loathsome by another group of men because they were of a different race and nationality. Such a response was wicked, especially here, since the individuals in view were also followers of Jehovah.

The same kind of racial hatred is alive and well in our day as well - and it is still wicked. To despise a man because his skin color given him by God is different, or because he is of a different race or nationality, is a form of murder. Just because someone is not an American, or because he is of Polish descent and I of German, or because he's black and I'm white (or vice versa), is no just reason to loathe and detest someone.

VOCATIONAL LOATHING.

Observe this wicked loathing at work in Genesis 46:33-4:

³³So it shall be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, "What is your occupation?" ³⁴that you shall say, "Your servants' occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we *and* also our fathers," that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd *is* an abomination to the Egyptians.'

Here was a case of vocational prejudice. A group of men loathingly hated another group of men because of their particular vocation which before God was an honorable, godly vocation. The same wicked loathing is commonly found today between the following groups in the work world: blue collar versus white collar workers, manual laborers versus those with desk jobs, professional people like lawyers and doctors versus garbage collectors and janitors, private businessmen or entrepreneurs versus employees of large corporations, union workers versus non-union workers, government leaders or government employees versus those in the private sector, etc. Such sinful prejudice ought not to be found regarding vocations which the living God views as all being honorable.

A LOATHING OF THE AFFLICTED.

Consider this in Job 19:17-19:

¹⁷My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am repulsive to the children of my own body.
¹⁸Even young children despise me;
I arise, and they speak against me.
¹⁹All my close friends abhor me,
And those whom I love have turned against me.

When Job was in the midst of grievous, multiplied afflictions, that which added to his misery was the fact that formerly close friends and family members now loathed him and wanted nothing to do with him, apparently in part because of the natural repugnance of his physical condition.

The Lord Jesus knew what it was to be so wrongfully despised as an afflicted one, for He is described in Isaiah 53:3 as follows:

He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

In sharp contrast to the reactions of sinful men, the living God is not like this toward His afflicted children. David in Psalm 22:24 tells us:

For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from Him;
But when He cried to Him, He heard.

We are to be like our God toward the afflicted, for the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:14 commended the Galatians for not having despised or rejected his bodily illness when he first came among them. We should carefully avoid such loathing and avoidance of those in distress, especially when they are our brethren, recognizing that generally such a sinful response flows from a selfish, shriveled heart which does not want to be bothered by someone who will likely be unable to return our kindnesses.

A LOATHING OF AUTHORITY FIGURES.

The Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 2:10 describes wicked apostates as:

. . . those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and **despise authority**. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed; they are **not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries**,

However, this wicked hatred of authority figures is not limited to the wicked. It is such a danger for Christians that Paul in 1 Timothy 6:2 had to warn Christian slaves:

And those who have believing masters, **let them not despise them** because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things..

It is a wicked thing in the eyes of God to despise others because they are those whom God has placed in authority over us whether they be our parents, husband, pastor, boss, or government official. Rather than loathing, there is to be an honoring of those in such places of authority over us.

A LOATHING OF THE "UNENLIGHTENED".

See this form of wicked loathing in Romans 14:1-3, 10:

¹Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. ³**Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat**, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. . . ¹⁰But

why do you judge your brother? Or **why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.**

Here there was a conflict over doubtful things - practices having to do with foods and other matters which were not clearly commanded in the word of God. For those who understood their Bibles more clearly and knew that a Christian had liberty in such matters, there was a real danger that they might respond with a sinful attitude toward weaker brethren who still had scruples in such matters. There would be a real temptation to regard them with contempt or loathing - to look down upon them because they were so unenlightened.

We likewise face the same temptation toward our weaker brethren in such matters of "Christian liberty" when we see them being more scrupulous in conscience than the Bible demands regarding the schooling of their children, nutrition, bottle-feeding of infants, the use of birth control, etc. We must not look down our snooty noses at such brethren with disdain and rejection, but rather must deal with them in light of the realities of your spiritual relationship with them as brothers in Christ, and of your awesome accounting before the Lord one day for the way in which you dealt with your "unenlightened" brother.

From what we have seen thus far, we are again reminded what our focus and motivation should be in our hating the wicked with loathing and loving the righteous with delight. It's not their skin color or race or appearance or sex or personality or vocation or outward prosperity or trials. It's not their position of authority over me, or their ignorance regarding certain practical truths of God's Word. It once again is their moral activity and character. This is the only proper motivation. When we say we should both hate the sin and the sinner, we are hating the sinner precisely because of his sin and the enmity toward our God which it reveals, **and not for any other reason.** But there is a further wicked form of loathing which we must not miss, and so we lastly take up:

SELF-RIGHTEOUS LOATHING.

See the vivid picture of such wicked loathing recorded in the form of a parable in Luke 18:9-14:

⁹Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." ¹³And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'

Now at first glance it might appear that this loathing or contempt was proper and righteous - that it is the loathing hatred to which we are commanded. Notice, it was directed against a man known to be an openly wicked man. It came from a man who outwardly seemed to be a pretty upright character. Yet the Lord Jesus condemned it. Why? Because this loathing came from a proud man who had never honestly faced his own sin and the fact that he deserved hell, and had never cried out to God to have mercy upon his soul. He had never come to first rightly loathe himself and his own sin, and thus he was a hypocrite. He was horribly inconsistent in his response to wickedness. For a loathing of wickedness and wicked men should start at home first of all. While Ezekiel 20:43-4 and 36:31 could also be referenced, notice just one further example of such righteous self-loathing - Ezekiel 6:9:

'Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations.'

There was a further problem with the self-righteous Pharisee's loathing in Luke 18 as well. It was directed toward a great sinner who was at that very moment acknowledging his sin and pleading for mercy, with the result that he was justified or declared righteous before God. This loathing was a loathing flowing from a proud, self-righteous, hypocritical heart which had no room for the grace of God in his own life, and thus had no room for that grace in the life of the one he loathed either. There was no room in his heart to change his view of the Publican and to begin to see him as a forgiven, justified child of God once that began to be true of the Publican, because the Pharisee had never been humbled before the grace of God Himself.

This tells us that a righteous hatred of loathing toward the wicked is not a proud, arrogant looking-down upon others from a sense of superiority. It is a humble revulsion toward sin and sinners by one who himself once was an enemy of God, who has himself come to see and admit and loath the vileness of his own sin and of himself, who freely acknowledges the just punishment he deserved, and who has tasted of the free grace of God as he followed and found forgiveness in Christ. It is a revulsion against that from which he has graciously been delivered, and against that which yet threatens his soul's eternal happiness.

In conclusion, what we have seen regarding wicked loathing calls us to three courses of action.

1. We are helped with struggles which we may have concerning the notion of a righteous hatred of loathing. It is a humble act of one who has first come to loathe himself as a wicked man, not a proud, harsh act of a smugly self-satisfied man looking down his nose at others.
2. We as Christians are especially called to evaluate if we are sinfully loathing men instead of righteously doing so. We need to take stock of what motivates us to loathe other human beings and make sure that it is not their race, skin color, job, relative ignorance, afflictions, or past history. Rather it should be their present enmity and hatred and disobedience toward the living God. And when we must respond with loathing to such wickedness toward God, we are, by what we have seen, called to be careful to loathe sin and sinners with a proper, humble disposition, whether the one in view is our child, spouse, Christian brother, etc.
3. We are reminded that we may outwardly loathe certain wicked men (like perverted homosexuals) but still be on our way to hell, like the self-righteous Pharisee of Luke 18. For many forms of loathing hatred will condemn those who practice them in impenitence on the final day of judgment.

But now, we are ready to consider a third element of what a conditional love of delight does not mean. It does not mean **that a loving delight in the righteous is the only godly form of delighting in men to be found in God's Word**. Thus we next take up:

CHAPTER NINE - OTHER GODLY FORMS OF DELIGHT IN MEN

Although a loving delight in the righteous and in righteousness is by far the predominant form of manward delight toward men taught in the Word of God, we find other forms of delighting in men which are also right and proper. At this point it is vital that we teach the whole counsel of God in order to avoid error and imbalance, and also in order to better understand other biblical duties which at times may seem to conflict with a love of delight and a hatred of abhorrence. So we will be pausing awhile to open up the other forms of godly delighting in men. The first form is the most general and all-encompassing. It is:

UNIT ONE - A GODLY DELIGHT IN ALL MEN ON EARTH

We will begin our study of this additional form of delight by doing what we have done all along - looking first at the example of the living God. So notice first of all:

THE REALITY OF GOD'S DELIGHT IN ALL MANKIND UPON THE EARTH IN GENERAL.

Probably the key text for establishing the fact that God delights in all men in a more general sense in addition to His special love of delight in the righteous is Proverbs 8:31. Observe this text as set in its preceding context of verses 12 and 22-31:

- ¹²I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
And find out knowledge and discretion.
²²The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
²³I have been established from everlasting,
From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.
²⁴When *there were* no depths I was brought forth,
When *there were* no fountains abounding with water.

²⁵Before the mountains were settled,
 Before the hills, I was brought forth;
²⁶While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields,
 Or the primeval dust of the world.
²⁷When He prepared the heavens, I was there,
 When He drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸When He established the clouds above,
 When He strengthened the fountains of the deep,
²⁹When He assigned to the sea its limit,
 So that the waters would not transgress His command,
 When He marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰Then I was beside Him, as a master craftsman;
 And I was daily *His* delight,
 Rejoicing always before Him,
³¹**Rejoicing in His inhabited world,
 And my delight was with the sons of men.'**

According to verse 12, the one speaking in our text is identified as God's wisdom, speaking as if she were a person. From the description found in verses 22-31, and from other indications elsewhere in Scripture, I believe wisdom should be understood to ultimately be a description of the pre-incarnate Son of God who was with the Father from eternity and played a prominent role as second person of the Godhead in the work of creation. Based upon this understanding, the words of verse 31 are therefore the words of God's Son. It is the Son of God who declares that He was beside Jehovah God at creation, being daily *His* delight, and **having His delight with (or in) the sons of men**. This last phrase, more literally, could be rendered, "**. . . and My delight (the) sons of men**".

As I have intimated, I believe that this last phrase of verse 31 teaches that God the Son presently has a general delight in all mankind upon the earth. However, this is far from the universal position among many godly commentators and pastors. So we are going to pause awhile in order **to consider in more detail the various ways in which this passage has been interpreted, and to seek to determine what its correct understanding should be**.

1. First of all, there are those who declare that **the Son's delighting in men in our text refers only to the period between man's creation and man's fall into sin**. They rightly point out that the time of the Creation is in view in the immediately preceding context. Also, because those who take this position are still thinking in terms of the Holy God's delight in that which is righteous and pure (the predominant form of God's delight elsewhere in Scripture), they rightly conclude that the Son of God could not delight in wicked men in this way after man's fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. So they argue that these words refer only to that brief period between the creation of Adam and Eve, and the Fall, when the living God could look at a creation unmarred by sin and the resulting curse, and wholeheartedly say that it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Now there is much to commend this position, and yet I believe that these godly commentators have missed (or at least fallen short of) the accurate understanding of these words at this point for two reasons:

a. **Immediately following verse 31, the scene switches to the present time, long after man's fall into sin, and thus it seems proper to regard verse 31 as transitioning to what follows.** Consider verses 30-33:

³⁰Then I was beside Him, as a master craftsman;
 And I was daily *His* delight,
 Rejoicing always before Him,
³¹**Rejoicing in His inhabited world,
 And my delight was with the sons of men.**
³²Now therefore, listen to me, *my* children,
 For blessed *are those who* keep my ways.
³³Hear instruction and be wise,
 And do not disdain *it*.'

Delitzsch argues in this fashion:

Since the statements of Wisdom, as to her participation in the creation of the world, are at this point brought to a close, in this verse (verse 31) there is set forth the intimate relation into which she thus entered to the earth and to mankind, and which she has continued to sustain to the present day.⁽¹⁷⁾

In other words, verse 31 provides the explanation for the earnest entreaties of Wisdom to men found in the verses following our text (and in earlier verses as well). She so pleads, not because she once delighted in the sons of men before the Fall but does so no longer. Rather, she so pleads because she continues to delight in them and desires to see them restored instead of being destroyed.

But there is yet a further (and most telling) argument:

b. The very term, "sons of men" indicates a broader reference than just the period between man's creation and man's fall. This is true in at least three ways.

First of all, we find no mention of Adam and his wife beginning to have children until Genesis 4:1 which follows the account of the Fall of man into sin found in Genesis 3. Therefore, apparently the only human beings on the earth during the period between man's creation on the sixth day and man's fall into sin were Adam and Eve. However, it is not accurate to refer to these individuals as the sons of men, for they were begotten directly by God, not through the womb of an earthly mother. In fact, in the genealogy of Christ found in Luke 3:38, Adam is differentiated from all the other names listed in that he is not described as the son of another man, but rather as "the *son* of God". Therefore, when we read of Wisdom delighting in the sons of men, the primary reference cannot be to a perfect Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, but rather to their fallen offspring after the Fall into sin.

This first fact is reinforced by a second reality that you can nowhere in the Bible find the terminology, "sons of men", used with specific reference to Adam and Eve. This specific language does not even appear in our Bibles until the Psalms, and where it does occur, it most frequently refers to the totality of mankind on the earth. Our broader understanding of the descriptive phrase, "sons of men", is especially bolstered by a third fact. The only other use of this phrase in the book of Proverbs, interestingly enough, happens to be located in the first part of this same chapter. Observe this significant use in 8:1-4:

¹Does not wisdom cry out,
And understanding lift up her voice?
²She takes her stand on the top of the high hill,
Beside the way, where the paths meet.
³She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city,
At the entrance of the doors:
⁴To you, O men, I call,
And my voice is to **the sons of men.**'

Here the words, "sons of men", clearly refer to the totality of fallen mankind on the earth to whom Wisdom lifts her voice. This is underscored by the closely-related terminology when Wisdom resumes her exhortations right after our text. Observe once again 8:32:

Now therefore, listen to me, *my children* (or sons),
For blessed *are those who* keep my ways.'

Wisdom here addresses her audience as sons (the same word in the Hebrew original as is translated "sons" in the phrase "sons of men" in verses 4 and 31). (Notice also that the "my" is supplied and is not found in the original text.) I do not believe that it is accidental that such parallel language is found right after Wisdom had spoken of having her delight in the sons of men in verse 31. In other words, the group in whom Wisdom delights is the same group she subsequently addresses. The very terminology of verse 31, "sons of men", considered in its context, constrains such an understanding.

Therefore, for the reasons given, I do not believe that we may rightly restrict Wisdom's delighting in the sons of men of verse 31 to the period between Creation and the Fall. Others have agreed with this conclusion, and have offered a further interpretation as either a substitute for or expansion upon the first view:

2. **They teach that the sons of men in whom Wisdom delights following the Fall are only those who have been redeemed by Christ from their sins - in other words, the righteous.** Thus, those taking this perspective would make the delight of Proverbs 8:31 basically equal to the loving delight which God is described as having toward the righteous elsewhere in Scripture - that loving delight which we have been studying and which we are to imitate. In other words, these godly commentators are, like the first group, seeking to stick to that form of delight which is indeed predominant in God's Word - a delight only in those in right relationship with God, having a right heart attitude of love toward God, and walking in general obedience to God. Although we should appreciate their sensitivity to the rest of God's Word, are these commentators and preachers accurate in their understanding of this particular text? I believe that they fall short of the full meaning for the following reasons:

a. **The 23 other uses of the terminology, "sons of men", in the Bible never have specific reference to just the elect.** Most commonly this phrase has the general meaning of the entirety of mankind on earth. However, on several occasions it actually refers to ungodly men in contrast with the righteous. (Compare Psalms 4:2-3; 57:4; 58:1-2; Ecclesiastes 8:11; 9:3). These latter references to the wicked would present a sharp contrast if the same phrase referred to only the elect in Proverbs 8:31. In summary, one would have to understand "sons of men" to have a unique meaning in our text, different from all other uses, and seemingly opposed to some uses, if "sons of men" exclusively means the righteous. Furthermore, as we have seen:

b. **The only other use of the terminology, "sons of men" in Proverbs - that located in the context of our text in Proverbs 8:4 - clearly includes in its scope wicked men, if not primarily having them in view.** Consider this verse again along with the following verse:

⁴To you, O men, I call,
And my voice *is* to **the sons of men**.
⁵O you simple ones, understand prudence,
And you fools, be of an understanding heart.'

Also, once again, related terminology to that of "the sons of men" is used of those whom Wisdom addresses right after 8:31 in verse 32. Here they are simply called "sons", and certainly include those who hate Wisdom and ultimately die. (Compare verse 36.)

c. **There are other biblical indications that there can and should be a righteous delighting in men other than that especially directed toward the righteous because of their spiritual sonship and character.** We will look at these biblical indications further in a moment.

So, based upon the reasons given, I do not believe that the sons of men in whom the Son of God delights according to Proverbs 8:31 can be limited to the period before the Fall, nor exclusively to the righteous during the period following the Fall. I believe that the biblical evidence demands that we understand Proverbs 8:31 to be describing **God's delighting in a real sense in all men on the earth since the Fall into sin**. In this I am not alone, for both Delitzsch⁽¹⁸⁾ and Matthew Poole⁽¹⁹⁾ agree with this conclusion.

However, there is a serious reason why many commentators and preachers have refused to adopt this understanding in addition to the fact that the predominant Scriptural emphasis is upon God's delight in the righteous. It is because of the false way in which other men have twisted this more universal understanding of Proverbs 8:31, which brings us to a third, wrong interpretation:

3. **There are those who jump at the fact of God's delighting in all men on the earth to argue for a natural religion - a religion according to which all men in the natural state in which they were born are supposedly accurate pictures or images of God's character, and therefore, for this reason, are objects of His delight.** In other words, they argue for a divine love of delight or complacency which delights in **all** men because they **all** are basically good or righteous. What do we say to such individuals?

a. **Such an interpretation of Proverbs 8:31 flies in the face of many other biblical passages regarding the sons of men including Ecclesiastes 8:11 and 9:3b** which declare:

^{8:11}Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore **the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.**"

^{9:3}. . . **Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil;** . . .

b. **This universal understanding contradicts the clear biblical evidence that God's image, which man was created to be, has been twisted and perverted in man's fall into sin.** This reality is clearly implied in Colossians 3:9-10:

⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

This passage teaches that the image of God in the natural man is not an accurate picture of the character of God, and needs to be restored in Christ.

c. Finally, **this heretical, universalist perspective is false because one verse which speaks of a general delighting by the Son of God in all mankind upon the earth does not somehow erase or negate all the other passages which speak of a conditional divine love of delight in only the righteous to the exclusion of the many wicked upon the earth whom God hates with a hatred of abhorrence and will ultimately destroy if they do not repent.** Such an approach is a little like stopping to pick up and admire one pretty little rock bouncing down a mountain slope while ignoring an avalanche of huge boulders racing down the hill at you and threatening to instantly crush you. Thus, the interpretation of adherents of natural religion and universalism who reject the total depravity of man must be forcefully rejected.

However, in our abhorrence of this serious and damning error, we must be careful that we do not throw out the baby of truth with the bath water of error. For Proverbs 8:31 does teach that God in some sense delights in all men on the earth. As we have seen, this general delight cannot be a delight in them because they all are righteous, spiritual children of God. So what lies behind God's universal delight? This brings us to a second matter. Having established that God does delight in all mankind upon the earth in general, we also need to understand:

THE MOTIVATION OF GOD'S DELIGHT IN ALL MANKIND UPON THE EARTH IN GENERAL.

God's delight in all men is a delight motivated by **the fact that men are His creatures in the first creation**, not that they are His new and righteous creation in Christ. Now on what basis do I say this?

1. First of all, **the context of Proverbs 8:31 indicates this.** As we have seen, although God's delighting in the sons of men cannot be limited to the period between man's creation and fall, it certainly has its taproots in that creation. If we read over Proverbs 8:31 and the preceding verses, it quickly becomes apparent that the spark for the delight of the Son of God here is not primarily His redemptive work which He would do for and in His elect in the future. Rather it is obviously the fact that mankind in general is the most glorious product of His original creating activity. Therefore He delights in them, because it is still true that each man is His handiwork. In a limited sense, by virtue of the original creation, each man is to some degree related to Him as His son (although not a spiritual son through regeneration and adoption who will be with the Father eternally) (Psalm 82:6, Acts 17:28-29).

2. However, many quickly object that that which has made man the most glorious product of God's original creation - God's image in man - has been seriously and negatively affected by the Fall into sin. Some argue that God's image has been totally eradicated, and therefore, that God can no longer delight at all in His human creatures.

However, such a conclusion goes too far regarding the effects of the Fall and the resulting curse. For God's Word indicates that **the Fall has not eradicated the image of God in man.** Observe this in Genesis 9:6:

'Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God
He made man.'

The fact that fallen man is still the image of God is the only way that the argument for capital punishment in this passage makes any sense. The reason given for requiring the blood of the murderer is the fact that the one murdered is the very image of God. This is why the Lord views that murder so seriously. It is an attack upon one who at the moment of the attack is His own created image of Himself. In other words, although greatly marred and twisted, whenever we look on a fellow human being, there are still glimmerings of the image of God

to be seen. And the living God delights in those glimmerings of His glory in His fallen image bearers, however faint they may be.

This means that the Lord as master-builder and architect still delights in the amazing ways that man's body functions. He still delights in the skills and abilities which even lost men yet display in many positive ways in subduing and ruling over the earth through a developing science and technology. The Son of God is pleased when the conscience He gave man still works to some degree and keeps even rebel sinners from plunging into greater wickedness. He is happy when the wicked still mirror God by externally doing deeds of kindness to others, by dwelling with their husbands and wives in relative peace, by loving and spending time with and disciplining their children. He delights in these glimmerings of His image in even fallen man, for in these ways all men still glorify Him as the Creator who made them that way.

This all brings us to a third fact:

THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S DELIGHT IN ALL MANKIND UPON THE EARTH IN GENERAL.

God's creationally-based delight in all men during their earthly lifetimes is expressed **in all the good which He does for men**, whether in His common grace flowing from His common or general love to them, or in His redemptive grace flowing from His electing love for some. I believe Matthew Poole has rightly grasped the full breadth of the meaning of Proverbs 8:31 when he expounds the words of Wisdom as follows:

My delights were with the sons of men, to uphold them by my power and providence, to reveal myself and my Father's mind and will to them from age to age, to assume their nature, and to redeem and save them, which I would not do for the fallen angels.⁽²⁰⁾

The Lord expresses His general, creational delight in the sons of men through His common grace toward them. He provides for their material needs, whether they are righteous or wicked. Furthermore, there is a sense in which every man benefited from the breaking of the Son of God into the earth because of the common grace benefits of the Gospel, including the free offer of the Gospel to all men. When Christ became a man and came into the world, in the language of John 1:9:

That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world.

However, in a real sense Christ also expressed His general, creational delight in mankind by dying especially for the elect. And He continues to express that delight by applying His cross-work during the earthly lifetimes of each of the elect. For He is restoring and recreating a new humanity who alone will occupy His new heaven and new earth. It is because He delights in mankind in general as His original creation that He has acted and is acting to restore and recreate men from among fallen mankind so that His elect will one day perfectly image their God as a new and completely holy mankind. He is not content to leave His created humanity in the earth in its present fallen state.

However, there is one further aspect of this other form of delighting in men which we must not fail to underscore:

THE APPLICATION OF GOD'S DELIGHT IN ALL MANKIND UPON THE EARTH IN GENERAL.

We are to imitate our God by delighting in all our fellow image-bearers as created by our God, even though that image has been distorted by sin. This may be proven in at least two ways:

1. First of all, we have earlier seen from the clear teaching of the Word of God that we are obligated to imitate our God by showing common or general love and kindness to all men, whether righteous or wicked. **If we are to thus imitate God's general love for mankind, then it stands to reason that it is also our duty to imitate God's righteous motivation behind that love, which is a delight in God's created image seen in our fellow men.**

2. But further, **God's Word clearly assumes that righteous men delight in the works of God.** Observe this theme in Psalm 111:1-2:

¹Praise the LORD!
 I will praise the LORD with *my* whole heart,
 In the assembly of the upright and *in* the congregation.
²The works of the LORD *are* great,
 Studied by all who have pleasure in them.

Since all of our fellow men must be included among the works of our God, we should delight in them, and seek out and take note of all of the ways in which they glorify our God so that we may more fully and earnestly praise Him. We should delight in the ungodly neighbor down the street when he patiently works with his daughter to teach her how to pitch a softball. We should rejoice when we behold the productive skills and hard work of wicked men around us. Our hearts should be pleased when we see lost sinners being kind to other. These glimpses of God's image in even lost men should prompt praise to the God who made them, and who is still dimly portrayed by them.

In closing, please give careful heed to four important final lessons with which God's Word confronts us.

1. What we have seen greatly helps us to understand the springs of God's common grace to all men, whether righteous or wicked. He loves all men on earth with a general love because He yet delights in all men as His creatures and image-bearers upon earth, even though that image has been twisted by sin. Even regarding God's common or general love to men, the element of doing true good to men is not the only element of love present, although it is the predominant one. There is also an element of delight in the object of the love as well, although not as wholehearted as God's complacent delight in the righteous because they are righteous.

2. What we have seen once again calls us to humbly submit to all that God's Word says regarding a particular theme, even if we wrestle with apparent mysteries, and find ourselves totally unable to put together all that we find. You may say, "I can't understand how either God or I can both abhor the wicked as wicked enemies and haters of my God and yet delight in them as creatures and image bearers of God who still to some extent show forth His glory. These things don't seem to fit together." I willingly acknowledge that I stand in the same company as yourself regarding this ignorance and inability. However, let not man divide asunder what God has put together. Both are true, and thus both are our duty. And in doing both we glorify our God who perfectly does both.

3. What we have seen help us to avoid serious errors on either hand in our dealings with the wicked around us.

a. Probably the greatest danger in our day is the temptation **to, in the name of acceptance and toleration and "unconditional love", so delight in the wicked that we fail to rightly abhor and hate them.**

b. But it is also possible **to overreact to the unbiblical perspectives of our day, and to be wickedly harsh and unloving toward the unsaved around us because we are failing to rightly delight in them.** The Word of God not only calls us to be kind to our enemies. It calls us to delight in them wherever we possibly can - **to really "love people to death"** (as one retired missionary has said), and thereby, by God's grace, see them brought to the Savior. For a delighting love in fallen fellow image-bearers of God will long to see God's twisted image restored in them through union with Jesus Christ by faith.

4. What we have seen forces us to keep a right and balanced view of the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ. They are not great celestial bullies. They delight in all men as their creatures. But they are perfectly holy and just judges who will ultimately deal with impenitent sinners with eternal wrath. So do not use Proverbs 8:31 to rationalize that all is well while you are continuing to walk as a stranger to God and an enemy of God. Be reconciled to God through His Son while the day of God's patience and longsuffering and mercy continues. Having now considered the most general of the additional forms of godly delighting in men taught in Scripture, a delight in all mankind upon the earth in general, we are ready to take up **further biblical forms of godly delight toward even unconverted men which are additional to a general, creational delight in all men, and which are closely-related to it.** First of all we take up:

UNIT TWO - A GODLY DELIGHT IN OUR CHILDREN

When we consider the biblical duty of loathing the wicked with a hatred of abhorrence, one question which immediately confronts us is how we are to apply this toward an unconverted spouse or unconverted children. Are not our wives and husbands and children to be the special objects of our affections?

The reality of a godly delight toward all men upon the earth in general gives us part of the answer to our dilemma regarding such lost loved ones. For there is a general delight which we should have toward them as creatures and image bearers of God which should constrain us to treat them with true kindness and mercy.

However, our wives and husbands and children are not just the mass of mankind, even if they do not know the Lord. We are bound to them in a special relationship. And so we still must wrestle with the issue of how we specifically are to hate the lost members of our immediate family with a hatred of abhorrence, and still deal with them in accordance with the special relationship we have with them which should be a loving relationship. We will, I believe, be given much help in this if we recognize that the Bible teaches that there are other godly forms of delighting in men which specifically have to do with such loved ones, even though they are not Christians. Let's approach these further forms of delight by tracing their relationship to the general delight in all men which we should have because they are God's creatures.

The creating God has not only made our fellow men in whom we are to delight. According to the first chapters of Genesis, He also established several ordinances at creation for the regulation of the lives of His human image bearers upon the earth. And elsewhere, God's Word tells us that **these creation ordinances and their good fruits which we experience should also be the objects of our delight**. Notice **two examples by way of introduction**:

The Sabbath Day, one special day in seven for rest from our normal labors and for God's worship, was established by God at creation according to Genesis 2:1-3. Then in Isaiah 58:13-14 we read:

¹³ If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
 From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
 The holy *day* of the LORD honorable,
 And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,
 Nor finding your own pleasure,
 Nor speaking *your own* words,
¹⁴ Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD;
 And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,
 And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.
 The mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

According to this passage we ought to call God's creation ordinance of the Sabbath a delight, and should observe it accordingly to the blessing of our souls.

There is a second creation ordinance, the fruits of which we are to delight in. That is **the ordinance of labor or work**. In Genesis 2:15 we find that from day one, even before the Fall into sin, the Lord established that man should have work to do upon the earth. Although, according to Genesis 3:17-19, man's work is now negatively affected by the curse resulting from his sin, several passages of God's Word indicate that he should still delight in his labor by delighting in God's gracious bounty which results from his labors. Consider the words of Ecclesiastes 5:18-20:

¹⁸ Here is what I have seen: *It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun* all the days of his life which God gives him; for it *is* his heritage. ¹⁹ As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and **rejoice in his labor** - this *is* the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because **God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart**. (Compare Deuteronomy 16:15; Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-13.)

There is a righteous delighting in the fruits of the creation ordinance of labor which should characterize us. Thus far I have mentioned a righteous delight in the creation ordinances of the Sabbath and labor, and in their fruits, to help establish the pattern of God's Word concerning all the creation ordinances. For the Bible specifically declares that the fruit of at least two other creation ordinances should also be the objects of our delight. In the case of both these ordinances, it is other people who are their fruits - other people who are closely-related to us. We will consider each of these creation ordinances in turn in more detail and see what God's Word says about delighting in their fruits.

There is first of all **the ordinance of procreation**. Notice the description of this creation ordinance in Genesis 1:27-28:

²⁷So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'

Here the Lord told Adam and Eve as a newly-created, married couple to be fruitful and have children and fill the earth. They were to reproduce as a result of the clear directive of God given at creation. Since God commands only what is good for man, it should not surprise us that the Lord later in Psalm 127:3-5 declares the following regarding children who spring from our marriages:

³Behold, children *are* a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb *is His* reward.
⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So *are* the children of one's youth.
⁵Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

If children are a fruit of one of God's creation ordinances, and if they therefore are a true blessing from the Lord, then it stands to reason that we should delight in them. Such a fatherly delight is indicated in Proverbs 3:12 where we read of a father's correcting of "the son *in whom* he delights".

However, there is a further reason why parents should love their children with a love of delight beyond the fact that those children are the fruit of one of God's creation ordinances. It is taken from the parallel drawn between God and earthly fathers in Proverbs 3:11-12.

¹¹My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor detest His correction;
¹²For whom the LORD loves He corrects,
Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

Here the godly father writing Proverbs warns his beloved son against a wicked loathing and rejection - a loathing and rejection directed toward the Lord's discipline or chastening which comes when one sins and does not repent. The reason for this warning is the reality that such chastening from God's hand is a proof of God's delighting love in the one so chastened. Then the writer of Proverbs draws a close parallel between God's chastening of His spiritual children and an earthly father's chastening of his son. Even as an earthly father spans and reproves the child in whom he delights, so God deals with His spiritual children. The Lord here amazingly indicates that His loving corrective discipline is like a human father's. Therefore, we may argue that that which is true of God's loving chastening is normally true, and should always be true of a human father's. As we have already observed, God the Father's chastening is rightly motivated by His love of delight in His spiritual children, and it is evidence of that loving delight. But does this mean that He lovingly delights in **all** of His spiritual children (and that human fathers should lovingly delight in **all** of their children)? This brings us to a further reality regarding this divine discipline in Hebrews 12:4-8 (where we find a loose quote of Proverbs 3:11-12):

⁴You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:
'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.'
⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

In these verses one truth stands out loud and clear - **the heavenly Father's chastening of someone is not only evidence of His delighting love. It is also evidence that the one he chastens is his son.** For the absence of chastening means that one is not a son. Therefore, the Father chastens **all** of his spiritual children, and he does so motivated by a delighting love for **all** of them. Since this chastening delighting love is parallel to that of a human father's, this means that a human father ought to, and normally will chasten **all** his children (compare Proverbs 19:18) because he lovingly delights in **each and every one** of his sons (or daughters). Based on this divine parallel, **Fathers, and more generally, parents, should delight in all their sons and daughters with a love of delight.**

Even as God delights with a special loving delight in His spiritual children, the righteous, because they are his spiritual offspring in the new creation; and, we might add, even as God in a more general and lesser way delights in all the sons of men because they are in a lesser sense his offspring through the original creation; so an earthly, human father and mother should delight in their children because they are the offspring of their loins and womb.

Now how should we apply what we have seen regarding our heart attitudes toward our children? Notice **three lines of application:**

1. Most obviously, we should lovingly delight in our children because they are the good fruit of God's creation ordinance of procreation, and because they are our own offspring. In a real sense this should be obvious. However, if many of us who are parents honestly face our own hearts, and the remaining corruption in them even if we are Christians, we must with grief acknowledge that all too often we do not delight in our children as we ought with a love of delight. We get worn down by the labor of caring for them and training and raising them and battling their sins. We frequently need new measures of grace to truly appreciate God's good gift to us of our children - to delight in and be pleased with and accept those good gifts. But do so we must - for this is the clear teaching of God's Word. In doing so we must be ready to go head to head with the prevailing attitudes of our day which in practical ways declare children to be a curse and bother and burdensome economic drain, and which tear "unwanted" children out of their mother's wombs in cold-blooded murder.

Those children in our homes, and even after they have left our home, should be the delight of our hearts, whether converted or unconverted. For the foundational basis for that delight is the fact that they are our offspring and the fruit of God's creation ordinance of procreation.

However, you may raise an objection here. Where does sin enter in, for my children at times do wickedness which grieves my soul and makes me loathe them with a righteous loathing? How do I put this all together? This brings us to two further applications. First:

2. This loving delight in our children will not ignore and be permissive toward the sins of our children. It will not be the unconditional love of the world. It will rather use God-ordained correction in order to remove that soul-destroying sin from the hearts of those in whom we delight - especially as long as they are younger and still under our roof. This is the clear point of Proverbs 3:11-12 and 19:18. For the reality is that, unless we adopt older children, we receive our children in a very immature and unformed condition at birth and are given an awesome responsibility to use the God-ordained means of the rod of discipline and reproof to remove the foolishness bound up in the heart of a child (Proverbs 22:15) and to give them true wisdom (Proverbs 29:15). It is true that God ultimately must work grace in the heart. But if we truly love and delight in our children, we will from their early days use God's means of corrective discipline for the hopeful salvation of their souls before they get older and it becomes too late to use these means.

There is one final line of application from what we have seen thus far:

3. This loving delight in our children flowing from the fact that they are our offspring does not negate or cancel out a loving delight in righteousness and the righteous, nor an abhorrence of wickedness and the wicked when it comes to our children. Notice this reality in Proverbs 29:17:

Correct your son, and he will give you rest;
Yes, he will give delight to your soul.

Someone might compare this verse with the passage we read before, Proverbs 3:11-12, and respond with confusion. "Which way is it?", they might ask. "Proverbs 3:11-12 says that a father disciplines his son because he delights in him. Proverbs 29:17 says he is to discipline his son so that he will be able to delight in him.

Which way is it? Does the delight come before or after the discipline?" And of course, the answer is, "Both". There is the delight in one who is my child because he is my child which moves me to deal with his sin. But that discipline is exercised so that I may be able to delight in my child with another and higher kind of delight - the loving delight of one righteous soul in another righteous soul - a delight which is especially intense when it may rightly be directed toward my own physical son or daughter. On the other hand, there is hardly any deeper grief and heart-ache imaginable for a Christian parent than when the child in whom he or she delights as his or her child grows up to be a wicked fool instead of a righteous son or daughter. Listen to several Proverbs which open up this reality:

. . . A wise son makes a glad father,
 But a foolish son *is* the grief of his mother. (10:1b)
 He who begets a scoffer *does so* to his sorrow,
 And the father of a fool has no joy. (17:21)
 A foolish son *is* a grief to his father,
 And bitterness to her who bore him. (17:25)
 Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice,
 But a companion of harlots wastes *his* wealth. (29:3)
 My son, be wise, and make my heart glad,
 That I may answer him who reproaches me. (27:11)
¹⁵My son, if your heart is wise,
 My heart will rejoice - indeed, I myself;
¹⁶Yes, my inmost being will rejoice
 When your lips speak right things. (23:15-16)
²⁴The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice,
 And he who begets a wise *child* will delight in him.
²⁵Let your father and your mother be glad,
 And let her who bore you rejoice. (23:24-25)

May I echo the wise man at this point? Our dear children who read these words, we delight in you. You are those brought into this world by the birth pangs of your mother. Most of you have been the recipients of careful instruction in the ways of the Lord and the objects of the repeated fervent prayers of your parents. We love you. Do you want us to be able to delight in you all the more and fully from the heart? Be wise and not a fool, to the breaking of our hearts. For we love King Jesus most of all - He has our utmost loyalties. And if you will not follow and serve Him, there is a day coming when we will have to take our side with him against you, despite our natural delight in you. Notice an Old Covenant picture of that future reality for all spiritually rebellious children of Christian parents found in Deuteronomy 21:18-21:

¹⁸ If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and *who*, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, ¹⁹then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. ²⁰And they shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." ²¹Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil *person* from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.'

These Old Covenant civil laws for the unique theocracy of Israel do not necessarily directly apply to civil governments today. But we do find a general principle here. The natural delight of godly parents for their children has its limits, if the child refuses to repent and believe the Gospel. For the love of delight and complacency in the righteous is the ultimate and highest form of delight.

Having noted the righteous delighting which parents should have toward their children, we must also recognize a second form of godly delight in individuals who are the fruit of a creation ordinance:

UNIT THREE - A GODLY DELIGHT IN OUR SPOUSE

At this point we must focus upon **the creation ordinance of marriage**. This creation ordinance is described in Genesis 2:22-24:

²²Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. ²³And Adam said:
 `This is now bone of my bones
 And flesh of my flesh;
 She shall be called Woman,
 Because she was taken out of Man.'
²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

From the very creation of man, the Lord established the ordinance of marriage in which one man was to be joined to one woman in a serious, one-flesh, covenant commitment before God. Marriage is not simply an invention devised by men for convenience as one of several alternative lifestyles including homosexual relationships. It is God's only ordained way in which the sexual gift is to be expressed upon the earth - in a committed relationship of companionship between one man and one woman.

The Word of God clearly indicates that when we are in such a marital relationship with a husband or wife, that husband or wife is a good blessing from the Lord. In Proverbs 18:22 we are told:

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
 And obtains favor from the LORD.*

Now of course there are qualifications which must be made at this point, especially concerning the character of the one whom you should seek as a marriage partner. However, it is still basically true that the personal fruit of the creation ordinance of marriage - my wife or my husband - is a good gift from God. Thus it should not surprise us when God's Word declares that our spouse should be the object of our delight. Let's consider the biblical evidence:

First of all, observe the words of Proverbs 5:15-20:

¹⁵Drink water from you own cistern,
 And running water from your own well.
¹⁶Should your fountain be dispersed abroad,
 Streams of water in the streets?
¹⁷Let them be only your own,
 And not for strangers with you.
¹⁸Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
¹⁹As a loving deer and a graceful doe,
 Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
 And always be enraptured with her love.
²⁰For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman,
 And be embraced in the arms of a seductress?

In these verses a husband is commanded to rejoice or delight in the wife of his youth and in no other woman. In this passage, this delighting is to be especially focused upon his wife's physical beauty while engaged with her in sacred intimacy.

Now notice, other women - the immoral woman and seductress - are made by God in the same way with the same general external physical features as his wife. Sexual relations are physically possible with women other than one's wife. So why shouldn't a man delight in the physical attractions of other women - mentally undressing them as they walk down the street in immodest clothing, or simply engaging in intimate relations with them? After all, God has made them beautiful too, hasn't He? Why is it that this young man is carefully commanded to delight only in his **wife's** physical beauty - to be exhilarated in physical intimacy with her alone? It's because she is his wife. She is God's good gift to him in a unique relationship solidly rooted in God's creation ordinance of committed marriage - a sacred ordinance which has been safeguarded by the moral law of God which declares, "You shall not commit adultery".

The biblical reason for a husband's delight in his wife is not just that she is the result of God's general creating activity. If that were the case then he might righteously delight sexually in any woman he meets as lewd men around us regularly do. But no, he is to delight explicitly and exclusively in his wife because she is for him

personally the fruit of God's creation ordinance of marriage. Here, in God's creation ordinance, are the taproots of sexual purity and of a godly delight in one's spouse.

But there is more Scriptural evidence for a righteous delighting in one's spouse. Consider with me the example of godly romantic marital love set before us in the book of Song of Solomon. Notice first of all 7:6-7:

⁶How fair and how pleasant you are,
O love, with your delights!
⁷This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts *like* its clusters.

Here we again see that a husband in a God-honoring marriage relationship will delight in the physical beauty of his wife. Consider also the words of Song 1:16 and 2:3-4:

^{1:16}Behold, you *are* handsome, my beloved!
Yes, pleasant!
Also our bed *is* green.
^{2:3}Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods,
So *is* my beloved among the sons.
I sat down in his shade with great delight,
And his fruit *was* sweet to my taste.
⁴He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his banner over me *was* love.

Here we learn that this delight in a person for his spouse does not only run in the direction of a husband toward his wife, but also should be the response of a wife toward her husband. A wife should delight in her husband - in his physical appearance - in his protection of her - in his provision for her - and in his expressions of love toward her.

Observe one final passage which clearly establishes this righteous delight in one's husband or wife - Isaiah 62:4:

You shall no longer be termed Forsaken,
Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate;
But you shall be called Hephzibah (My Delight Is in Her), and your land Beulah (Married);
For the LORD delights in you,
And your land shall be married.

In a figurative passage in which the Lord speaks of His relationship to Old Covenant Israel, he first speaks of her as having been forsaken or desolate which are synonymous terms. Then he uses two other terms which obviously are also meant to be understood as synonyms of each other. Notice that which basically means the same thing as "Married" here. It is "My Delight Is in Her". To be married means basically the same as being the object of the delight of one's husband - so closely bound together are these two ideas.

So in conclusion, the Word of God clearly indicates that my husband or wife should be the object of my loving delight and acceptance simply because he or she is my husband or wife. My delight in my spouse is a delight in the personal fruit of God's creation ordinance of marriage.

However, in addition to delighting in one's spouse, the Word of God presents to us a further dimension of especially a husband's love toward his wife which should be considered at this point. Observe this dimension in Ephesians 5:25-27:

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, ²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

This passage makes a parallel between Christ's dying love for the church and the love a husband should have toward his wife. If you remember, early in our study of unconditional love we noted that Christ's death on the cross for His people was a manifestation of God's electing love - a love that was unconditional as far as the

initial character and behavior of its recipients was concerned. So also, I believe that it is proper to understand this passage to be teaching that a husband's love for his wife should likewise be unconditional. In marrying her, he has chosen to set his love upon her and do her good no matter how she acts. He is in a real sense to nourish her and care for her and seek to see her brought to greater conformity to Jesus Christ no matter what she does, or what her character may prove to be. His love toward her is to be committed, unconditional love, even as Christ's was toward His church. Here, in the bonds of marriage, is another place where there should be unconditional love.

How then should we **apply** to ourselves what we have seen regarding delight in and love toward our spouses?

1. Most obviously, we who are married should delight in our spouses (and in no one else in this way), because my husband or my wife is God's good gift to me as a fruit of the creation ordinance of marriage.

Furthermore, we who are husbands are especially obligated to love our wives with a sacrificial, unconditional love which seeks to do good to them no matter how they may act or respond. That is the clear teaching of the Bible. If we are married, we are in it for keeps as far as God is concerned, and we are obligated before Him to view our spouses aright, no matter what.

However, what we have seen has a further significance:

2. Our delight in our spouse, and a husband's Christ-like, unconditional love for his wife, will cause us to kindly, yet in a principled manner, seek to see sin avoided and put away in the life of our spouse, and to see them truly follow the Lord if they presently do not love Him.

Remember that a husband's love for his wife in Ephesians 5:25-27 is to parallel that of the Lord's for his church as He seeks to ". . . sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." The unconditional love of a husband for his wife seeks to help her become more holy and righteous. It is not indifferent toward or tolerant toward wickedness like the unconditional love proclaimed by the godless humanist.

The wife also in a respectful, gracious way should be concerned to help her husband in whom she delights to avoid and repent of sin in his life. We see this in the example of righteous Abigail who graciously and respectfully stopped her future husband, David, from a course of sin before she was even married to him. In this, arguing from the lesser degree of relationship and responsibility to the greater, she became an example for wives for all time. For if she rightly did this before she was married to David, how much more should wives do this toward the husbands in whom they must and do delight.

Finally, and closely-related:

3. This loving delight in our spouses flowing from the fact that they are the personal fruit of God's creation ordinance of marriage does not negate or cancel out a loving delight in righteousness and the righteous, nor an abhorrence of wickedness and the wicked when it comes to our spouses.

The Word of God indicates that some marriage partners do not bring much delight to their spouses because of their grievous wickedness. Let me just briefly remind you of such passages in the book of Proverbs:

He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house,
 But he who hates bribes will live. (15:27)
¹³ . . . the contentions of a wife *are* a continual dripping.
¹⁴Houses and riches *are* an inheritance from fathers,
 But a prudent wife *is* from the LORD." (19:13b-14)
It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop,
 Than in a house shared with a contentious woman." (21:9 & 25:24)

A wicked and vile husband or wife will bring much grief to the righteous heart, and even loathing, even while that righteous heart must delight in his or her spouse because she or he is one's spouse. The one does not cancel out the other. And once again, a delighting love in the righteous and righteousness is higher and ultimate over the delight one has and should have naturally toward his spouse. This is true in at least two ways:

a. **The relationship between a Christian parent and his child in a real sense never ends as long as they are alive on this earth, but a marriage relationship on this cursed earth may come to an end in two biblical ways.**

The marriage bond may be broken in divorce if one marriage partner breaks the marriage covenant by committing adultery with another (Matthew 19:9), or if a believing spouse is deserted by a wicked, unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15). In such cases of divorce there is no longer an obligation to continue delighting in and unconditionally loving the one who was once your spouse, because there is no longer a marriage relationship. A husband's unconditional love for his wife is only unconditional within the bonds of marriage. So in another sense, it is conditional, and ends once the marriage bond has been ruptured in divorce. But also:

b. **There is an awful day coming when all Christian spouses will have to turn their backs upon and eternally reject spouses who were never converted.** As with the parent-child relationship, this is pictured for us in an Old Covenant setting. Observe the words of Deuteronomy 13:6-11:

⁶ If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, **the wife of your bosom**, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, ⁷of the gods of the people which *are* all around you, near to you or far off from you, from *one* end of the earth to the *other* end of the earth, ⁸you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; ⁹but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. ¹⁰And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. ¹¹So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.'

Once again, these Old Covenant civil laws for the unique theocracy of Israel do not directly apply with regard to civil governments today. However, we do find a general principle here for the Christian. This passage teaches us that a delight in our spouse has its limits, while loyalty to Christ and a loving delight for the righteous and a loathing of the wicked should be and will be the enduring responses of our hearts out into all eternity. In this there is also a sober word to those who are unconverted spouses of Christians. The blessings of the relationship which you now enjoy are limited and all too soon will come to a screeching halt with your Christian spouse standing openly on the side opposing you as your enemy if you do not repent and cast your soul in faith upon Christ.

Having now shown that a delight in the righteous is not the only form of godly delighting in men taught in the Bible, we come to three more things which the love of delight and hatred of abhorrence do not mean. Consider with me:

CHAPTER TEN - FURTHER QUALIFICATIONS

The first remaining thing which a conditional delighting love and abhorring hatred do not mean is:

THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ONE PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT TO BE THE PROPER OBJECT OF EITHER DELIGHTING LOVE OR ABHORRING HATRED TO CHANGE CATEGORIES.

We have established that our conditional responses of either delighting love or abhorring hatred depend upon the great category of mankind into which a person falls - either the wicked or the righteous. However, as we have already indicated, the Word of God also clearly indicates that it is possible for changes to take place from one group to the other, or at least in our perception of the group to which a person belongs. Let's consider each possible transition in turn. First:

1. **A change from apparently being a righteous man to being an openly-revealed, wicked man.** Notice one relevant passage - Ezekiel 18:24:

‘But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and **does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does**, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the

sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.'

At first glance, this passage would seem to teach that a truly converted man is able to lose his salvation and become a wicked man. However, Matthew Henry has, I believe, accurately and helpfully described the person here in view:

Here is . . . the character of an apostate, that *turns away from his righteousness*. He never was in sincerity a righteous man (as appears by that of the apostle, 1 John ii.19, *If they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us*), but he passed for a righteous man. He had the denomination and all the external marks of a righteous man; he thought himself one, and others thought him one. But he throws off his profession, leaves his first love, disowns and forsakes the truth and ways of God, and so *turns away from his righteousness* as one sick of it, and now shows, what he always had, a secret aversion to it; and, having *turned away from his righteousness*, he *commits iniquity*, grows loose, and profane, and sensual, intemperate, unjust, and, in short, *does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does* . . . ⁽²¹⁾

And the end result for such a man is that he will eternally perish if he remains in his state and does not repent. In such a tragic case, the Lord, of course, knew all along what was true of the man and did not ever delight in him with a love of delight toward him as a righteous man. But it is possible that we the children of God, who do not see the heart, may have been fooled by the false profession of such a man and delightfully loved him. What then should be our response when he is exposed to actually be a wicked man? We then should loathingly hate him as any other ungodly person. There may, in our experience, be a change in our response to a specific individual - here because it becomes evident that he is not the righteous saint we thought him to be.

Before we pass on, I do want to underscore one further word of application. **We see here the great danger and loss for any who profess the name of Christ if they fall away from Christ.** Not only will there be the loss of the delight of God's people and the incurring instead of their loathing, but most horribly there will be eternal destruction cut off forever from God in torment if they do not repent. We have seen that one thought to be a righteous man and therefore the rightful object of our delighting love may be revealed to actually be a wicked man whom we should loathingly hate. However, there is an opposite possible transition which may occur as well:

2. **An actual change from being wicked to righteous.** May I remind you again of the inspired words of Hosea 14:1-4:

¹O Israel, return to the LORD your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity;
²Take words with you,
And return to the LORD.
Say to Him,
`Take away all iniquity;
Receive *us* graciously,
For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.
³Assyria shall not save us,
We will not ride on horses,
Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands,
"*You are our gods.*"
For in You the fatherless finds mercy.'
⁴I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from him.'

In this passage the Lord indicates that it is possible for a man's spiritual condition to change from that of a wicked man to that of a righteous man, with a subsequent change in His response to that changed man. He declares that He will cease to be angry with His Old Covenant people and will love them freely when they repent of their sin and return to trust in the Lord. Here we see the grace of God in changing His disposition of heart toward hell-deserving rebels once they turn from their rebellion and make the Lord their confidence alone. He ceases to be angry with them and loathe them with abhorrence, and instead begins to love them with delight.

Such is the Lord's response toward any wandering, lost sheep who turns to Him in faith and repentance, whether Jew or Gentile. And such should be our response to repenting sinners, in imitation of our Lord. We should not be like the self-righteous Pharisee who despised the tax-gatherer because of his past sins, even while the tax-gatherer was in the act of repenting and pleading with God for mercy in the temple. We should not hold the repenting sinner's past sins against him. They are forgiven in Christ just as ours are. Thus we should stop loathingly hating him and begin delightfully loving him when the great transition from the ranks of the wicked to the righteous occurs.

In conclusion, since the love of delight and the hatred of loathing are conditioned upon the behavior and character of the person involved - and since a man's character can change from being wicked to being righteous, or be revealed to be wicked when it was thought to be righteous - our response should change when the behavior and character changes, or is seen to be the opposite of what we previously thought.

But now notice a further, closely-related thing which the duties of a conditional love of delight in the righteous, and a conditional hatred of abhorrence toward the wicked do not mean. They do not mean:

THAT OUR RESPONSES IN THIS LIFE TOWARD EITHER THE WICKED, OR THE RIGHTEOUS WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH SIN, MAY EVER CEASE TO REFLECT THE GRACE OF THE GOSPEL.

Notice first of all the impact which the grace of the Gospel should have upon our attitude toward:

1. **The wicked.** Although this reality has been alluded to and mentioned in various ways already during our study, it is vitally important that we underscore it - **especially when we are talking about loathing the wicked around us with a detesting hatred.** Yes, we are to take God's side and abhor the wicked and their wickedness. And yes, we should desire the judgment of the **impenitent** wicked. But we must also never forget that other way which God has provided by which the wicked may cease to trouble the righteous and the earth with their wickedness. As we have seen, there is a gracious path by which the responses of the hearts of those of us who love God may righteously do an about face and begin to delight in the very same individuals toward whom we had previously felt abhorrence and loathing. It's the same path which all of us who know the Lord have already traveled so that we ourselves have changed from being the objects of God's loathing hatred to being objects of His delighting love. It is the path of repentance from one's sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the path of the Gospel of God's grace, a path freely offered to all men if they will but respond and follow Christ (Hosea 14:1-4).

In light of this reality, **the possibilities - the potentialities - of the grace of the powerful Gospel should permeate and regulate all our despising of the wicked.** We should earnestly and hopefully labor with all our might to see every man brought to embrace that gracious Gospel. An abhorrence of the wicked does not call us to isolate ourselves totally from them in a sort of Christian ghetto. Rather, we should be willing to interact with and rub shoulders with wicked men, women and children - not in order to cave in and compromise our lives in an effort to make them our closest companions - but even as Christ did, eating dinner with publicans and sinners, in order to draw them to Christ by our firm stand for the Lord through our lives and our words. For again, the reality is that we who yet walk upon the earth do not know the eternal decrees of God. Thus we do not know who among the presently wicked men upon the earth will stay that way, and who will be changed by the grace of God through the Gospel of God's undeserved, unearned, free favor. **That very uncertainty, the freeness and sincerity of Christ's offer of Himself to sinners, and our abhorrence of wicked men and deeds should drive us to rescue lost sinners around us from the hellish-burning with fear.** For after all, is that not what others have done for us? Is that not what the Lord has done to those of us who were once a stench in His nostrils? How can we do any less as debtors to the grace of God?

To those of you who yet remain among the wicked there is a word from what we have seen. We who love God do loathingly hate you. We cannot help but do so for the God we love does the same. Contrary to the first of the so-called "Four Spiritual Laws" so popular among evangelicals a number of years ago - "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life"⁽²²⁾ - God in a real sense hates you and has a horrible plan for your life if you continue as you are. But that does not mean that we have totally rejected you and want to have nothing to do with you. Quite the contrary. We want you to stop being wicked. We long that you would stop being God's enemy and hating God. We greatly desire to be able to delight in you as a brother in the spiritual family of God. Do not turn a deaf ear to us. There is good news! Christ has died for sinners like you. He came to the earth to

seek and to save those who like you are lost. There is hope. Things can be different. Go to Christ now and be done with your rebellion and plead for mercy. He will receive you, for He has declared, ". . . the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37b).

In addition to wicked men, the grace of the Gospel should also impact upon our responses toward:

2. **Struggling, sinning brothers and sisters in Christ.** There is another way in which we must not fail to remember the grace of the Gospel when it comes to the love of delight and hatred of abhorrence. We have seen that there rightly are differing degrees of delighting love toward the righteous depending upon the degree to which they reflect the character and will of God. Christ delighted in some of His followers - Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and the Apostle John - more than others. We will rightly at times wrestle with being able to delight very much in the brother in Christ who is presently struggling and seemingly caving in to sin in his life. However, **in our dealings with the struggling, sinning brother we must likewise not forget the grace of God in the Gospel.** May I remind you of a fact regarding the delighting love of God toward His children which we noted earlier? Compare the words of John 14:21 & 23 with those of John 16:27 and 17:6:

14:21 'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.' . . . 23 Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'

16:27 'for the Father Himself loves you, because **you have loved Me**, and have believed that I came forth from God.'

17:6 'I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and **they have kept Your word.**'

The Lord Jesus clearly established here that He and the Father delightingly love with a responsive love those who love them, and have and keep their word. But then the Lord Jesus went on to declare that the Apostles to whom He spoke in that upper room did indeed love Christ and indeed did keep the Word of the Father. Yet of whom was He speaking? Of those who only shortly before had been squabbling over who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Luke 22:24). Of those who would slumber while our Lord agonized in the Garden (Matthew 26:40; 43; 45). And of those who would flee when their Lord was arrested (Matthew 26:56). Yet of these the Lord Jesus said that they loved Him and kept the Word of the Father. How our Lord graciously saw a lot where there seemed to be so little in His true children.

As we saw before, **this example of our Lord** is a great comfort to the true child of God regarding his own case. The Lord is not a nit-picky perfectionist who can never be satisfied with His children. He is an exceedingly gracious Lord to follow. But there is a further application of this.

Our Lord's response **should be imitated by us in the way in which we view and respond to our brethren struggling with their sin.** If you ask, "How could the Lord Jesus speak so approvingly of such faulty disciples?", there can only be one response ultimately regarding this Savior who is perfectly just and true and righteous. It was the grace of the Gospel. By God's grace, in many ways these disciples did actually love Christ and obey His commands from the heart. However, this aspect of God's grace cannot fully explain Christ's words here. We must also keep before us the further fact that for those who have truly cast their souls and their all upon Christ in faith, and pled for the forgiveness of their sins, there has been the crediting of the perfect righteousness of Christ to their bankrupt moral account before God so that they are declared and treated as righteous before Him.

The gracious evaluation and words of our Lord in John's Gospel call us to likewise graciously deal with our true brethren even while we are grieved and vexed and yes, abhorred, over the vileness yet appearing in their lives. **If there is good reason to believe that they are true Christians, then we like our Lord should look with compassion on many infirmities, and pass by many defects in the matter of delighting in them as the righteous.** For after all, do they not have to do the same toward us. Did not even the Martha whom Jesus specially loved sin in carnal complaining and anxiety while she was so busy serving her Lord? Did not even the specially beloved Apostle John evidently at least initially flee the scene in fear and unbelief when the Lord Jesus was arrested? How can any of us say we have offended less?

In conclusion, a love of delight for the righteous, and a hatred of abhorrence toward the wicked do not mean that our responses in this life may ever cease to reflect the grace of the Gospel - whether toward the wicked or the struggling saint. Closely-related is a final reality which the love of delight and hatred of abhorrence do not mean.

They do not mean:

THAT OUR DUTY TO IMITATE THE OTHER DIMENSIONS OR DEGREES OF GOD'S LOVE FOR MEN ARE IN ANY WAY CANCELED OUT OR NEGATED.

Our duty to manifest a conditional love of delight in the righteous alone especially does not in any way cancel out our duty to manifest an unconditional common or general love of benevolence to all men whether righteous or wicked. We dare not make God's Word oppose itself in this way, for the living God cannot lie or contradict Himself. All forms of our biblical duty to love our fellow men are always in force as long as we live in this present sin-cursed earth, even if it seems difficult to understand how all together can consistently be our duty, which brings us to a final matter of:

CONCLUSION

Having now ended our study of the third and last dimension of God's love for men - that of His conditional love of delight and complacency - we come to consider **a final important matter of conclusion for our entire study of the subject of unconditional love.**

When we come to the subject of unconditional love - whether we speak of God's love for men, or our own imitating love for men - we come to a subject of seeming contradiction and apparent tension. We wrestle at how we should put all the pieces together regarding God's love toward men and our love toward our fellow men. Furthermore, the apparent tensions are not fully eased for us by recognizing and opening up the various dimensions and degrees of biblical love toward men. In a real sense they are but clarified by such a study. We now know what the various dimensions of God's love for men are. And we now know what the various dimensions of our love for men should be. We also know that we dare not leave out any one of these dimensions, which means that we still must wrestle with how to put all of these things together in our understanding of God and of our own duty. The apparent tensions still remain. How can God from all eternity set His electing love upon only some men while reprobatingly hating others, and how can He respond to the righteous with a love of delight and to the wicked with a conditional hatred of abhorrence, and yet show love and kindness to all men on earth including the wicked -- even offering to the wicked the Gospel in a free and sincere offer flowing from a divine heart which does not desire the death of the wicked? Regarding our own duty, how do **we bring together the duty of having an unconditional love for all men based upon a creational delight in them with that of a conditional love of delight for only the righteous while abhorringly hating the wicked. As we conclude, we will consider three important matters regarding this remaining apparent tension as it relates to our duty before God.**

First of all, notice with me:

THE BIBLICALLY-BASED REALITY OF THIS APPARENT TENSION ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES UPON THIS PRESENT EARTH.

At this point I want to simply seek to bring to clearer focus the tension we feel by first noting a pair of Scripture passages, and then briefly reviewing the examples of three godly men in the Bible. So first of all, consider:

1. **A striking pair of passages.** Compare Psalm 58:10-11 with Proverbs 24:17-18:

^{Psalm 58:10}The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked,
¹¹So that men will say,
'Surely *there is* a reward for the righteous;
Surely He is God who judges in the earth.'

Proverbs 24:17¹⁷Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
 And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
¹⁸Lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease Him,
 And He turn away His wrath from him.

At first glance, these two verses seem to be saying the opposite of each other. In Psalm 58 we see a righteous rejoicing in God's judgment of one's enemies. Then in Proverbs 24 we are told that it is wicked to rejoice when our enemies fall. How are we to understand these two verses which seem to apply to the same situation - God's judging of our wicked enemies? I believe the only way is to recognize that **it is the reason why we are rejoicing over our enemy's fall - its motivation - which determines whether that rejoicing is godly or wicked.**

If we are proudly gloating over the downfall of our foe as those who think we somehow deserve better, or maliciously delighting in the personal human misery and suffering of our enemy (Proverbs 24:17-18), then we are sinning and may bring the rod of God down upon our own backs. For God's actions in afflicting and destroying His enemies are not acts of arrogance or malice. As we've seen before, according to Ezekiel 18:32, He has no pleasure in the death of any lost sinner who dies. According to Lamentations 3:33a, He does not afflict men willingly or from His heart. There is a divine reluctance to use His rod and sword because the Lord has a heart which is tender and kind toward all men, even His enemies, and He therefore does not maliciously delight in their misery.

Yet on the other hand, if we are rejoicing in the destruction of our enemies because it is proof that God is who He says He is, and surely keeps His Word - if we are exulting because it indicates that He as a righteous judge will ultimately sort everything out according to perfect justice, judging the wicked, and rescuing and rewarding the righteous (Psalm 58:10-11) - then our response is godly and righteous. For we are exulting in the glory of our God and Savior, and of His righteousness and faithfulness, which are always appropriate causes for praise and joy.

Thus, all of our days upon the earth we must wrestle with the seeming tension with which these two passages confront us - carefully avoiding rejoicing in the downfall of the wicked for the wrong reasons, and even weeping over their misery, while delightedly rejoicing in the same downfall for the right reasons. Given the fact of the remaining corruption of our own hearts, this is no easy thing to sort out and practice, but do it we must, repenting of our sin when we are wrongly motivated, and responding in obedience with the right motivations.

2. But next, notice this seeming tension in **the lives of three godly men in the Bible.**

a. First of all, consider **King David**. We have already noted that he was the inspired human author of the most severe imprecatory language in the Psalms. In Psalm 139:21-2, he had declared:

²¹Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You?
 And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?
²²I hate them with perfect hatred;
 I count them my enemies.

Yet on two occasions when he could have easily snuffed out the life of his greatest enemy, King Saul, he mercifully spared his life, even stopping his friends from what they earnestly wanted to do, because Saul was the Lord's anointed. And he, at risk to himself, respectfully let Saul know how he had spared him as a call to this king to repentance for his sins (1 Samuel 24 and 26).

However, even in addressing Saul on those occasions, notice how David spoke:

'Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. . . Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand.' (1 Samuel 24:12 & 15)

Yet when God had avenged David on Saul, and the news of Saul's death had reached David, David responded with mourning and weeping and fasting; composed a remarkable eulogy of praise for Saul as well as for his godly son Jonathan; and put to death the messenger who claimed to be the murderer of his dead enemy (II

Samuel 1). What a seemingly strange combination in one man, and yet what a godly reflection of all the will of God.

b. Notice more briefly a second example of a godly man wrestling with the apparent tensions at this point - that of **the prophet Jeremiah**. Compare with me Jeremiah 9:1-2 and 11:19-20:

^{9:1}Oh, that my head were waters,
And my eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night
For the slain of the daughter of my people!
²Oh, that I had in the wilderness
A lodging place for wayfaring men;
That I might leave my people,
And go from them!
For they *are* all adulterers,
An assembly of treacherous men.

^{11:19}But I *was* like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, *saying*, 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more.'
²⁰But, O LORD of hosts,
You who judge righteously,
Testing the mind and the heart,
Let me see Your vengeance on them,
For to You I have revealed my cause.

What a strange mixture there seems to be in this the weeping prophet. We find him weeping over the destruction and misery of his vile fellow Israelites as one who, with His God, did not delight in the death of the wicked, and who knew that His God did not afflict from the heart (Lamentations 3:33). Yet he, out of loathing, could not stand to be around them in close companionship, and called upon the Lord to bring vengeance upon them for trying to kill him because he was God's faithful prophet. Jeremiah was one who had learned to live with a torn-up heart, seemingly being wrenched with strong emotions in at least two different directions.

c. Even more striking is that picture of perfect manhood which is found in the person of our **Lord Jesus Christ**: Notice the words of Psalm 69:20-28:

²⁰Reproach has broken my heart,
And I am full of heaviness;
I looked *for someone* to take pity, but *there was none*;
And for comforters, but I found none.
²¹They also gave me gall for my food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.
²²Let their table become a snare before them,
And their well-being a trap.
²³Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;
And make their loins shake continually.
²⁴Pour out Your indignation upon them,
And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.
²⁵Let their habitation be desolate;
Let no one dwell in their tents.
²⁶For they persecute *him* whom You have struck,
And talk of the grief of those You have wounded.
²⁷Add iniquity to their iniquity,
And let them not come into Your righteousness.
²⁸Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
And not be written with the righteous.

When we studied the imprecatory Psalms earlier, we observed that their language is often the prophetic description of the prayers of the coming Messiah. Here we have one such clear instance where the One given

gall for His food and vinegar for His thirst (a clear prediction of Christ at the cross) speaks out in strong language calling upon God to curse those who afflicted and tormented Him. This is, as it were, the language of Christ looking back at the cross, and should not be forgotten as we now take note of His recorded prayer at the cross found in Luke 23:33-34a:

³³And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' . . .

There is a textual question regarding this petition. However, the prayer is backed up by strong manuscript evidence, and thus we will assume that it is indeed part of the inspired text. Based upon that assumption, what a startling contrast we find here with the imprecations of Psalm 69. Here we find Christ obeying His own command of Matthew 5 and Luke 6 to pray for one's enemies. He prayed that the Father would forgive those who crucified Him because they did not know what they did.

Good men have differed regarding the meaning of Christ's words here, but I have found the position of William Hendriksen to be persuasive and recommend his commentary on Luke⁽²³⁾ for further study beyond the summary I'm about to give. Since there can be no enduring, eternal, personal forgiveness apart from true repentance, the Lord was evidently asking the Father to sovereignly bring His tormentors to true repentance so that there could be full pardon. He was praying for their salvation - a prayer which was answered for many of His persecutors. We do not know for sure the final result, but the Gentile Roman centurion at the cross appears to have been deeply affected spiritually the day of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:54; Luke 23:47). Thousands of Jews whom Peter could accuse of nailing Jesus to a cross were indeed brought to repentance on the day of Pentecost and later in Jerusalem (Acts 2:23&41; 3:13-15 & 4:4). Yet, the Lord also prayed imprecations against His tormentors - evidently toward those who did not and would not repent.

According to Luke 19:41-44, the Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He drew near it in his triumphal entry because of their rejection of their Messiah and the horrible judgment which would surely result. Here were tears of real compassion which later could lament:

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!' (Matthew 23:37)

Yet, just before this lament He also pronounced fearful woes upon the Jewish leaders in that very city (Matthew 23:1-36). And according to Revelation 19:11-16, this very same Jesus will return as a righteous and true Judge with a sharp sword going out of His mouth with which to strike the nations, and ruling the nations with a rod of iron while He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Which part of this is the real Jesus? It all is.

In **conclusion**, the examples and passages we have seen tell us that if we would fully follow the will of God regarding loving our fellow man in this present world, we must be prepared to have our hearts torn up in seemingly opposite directions as we weep and pray with compassion and sympathy for the miserable plight of wicked men and women and children around us, and yet loathe them and desire their removal in judgment if they do not repent. As parents we must be prepared to delight in our children as our own offspring and to weep many tears in prayer and groaning over them, while at the same time being repulsed by their wickedness and driven to take up the rod. We should expect quite mixed emotions when facing and dealing with the sins of the Christian husband or wife or fellow member in the church. **The Word of God calls us to a lifetime of seeming contradiction and tension in loving our fellow men. This will be the reality of obedience to our God in a fallen world. And we must embrace that reality, following the example of our Lord during the days of His flesh on this same sin-cursed earth.**

We must steadfastly resist that carnal tendency to exalt our reasons and minds above God and His Word, and to end up denying one side or the other of such apparent tensions and contradictions because we cannot understand them or bring them together in our puny intellects. We must reject the error of Arminian brethren who usually deny that there should be a conditional love of delight and opposite hatred of abhorrence because they cannot reconcile it with a general love toward all men. But we must even more abhor the serious error of Hyper-Calvinistic brethren who deny the duty of general love to all men, and especially deny our duty to earnestly press the free and sincere offer of the Gospel to all men because they cannot reconcile this with God's

unconditional electing love and conditional love of complacency. Let us not be wiser than God in order to exalt our proud minds, and to avoid the flesh-withering struggle of living with apparent tensions in loving our fellow men.

On the other hand, **what we have seen should encourage as well as challenge the true child of God, because if we have true grace in our hearts, we have already found ourselves responding in these seemingly contradictory ways toward the wicked around us.** The Word of God which we have been studying indicates that we are not crazy to so respond. We are not necessarily wicked and vile and unloving for despising the wicked, nor are we necessarily soft on sin for tenderly loving them and seeking their good. We are not necessarily wicked and unloving to respond strongly and negatively toward the sins which arise in our brethren, nor are we necessarily failing to be principled and godly when we for good and gracious reasons overlook many of their faults and continue to delight in them. We as parents will and should rightly find diverse responses in our hearts toward our children as we deal with them - all of which may very well be righteous. In this way we should be encouraged that we are responding in a godly way as we live with the seeming tension with which life in this present world confronts us.

But it certainly is not easy to live with such seeming tension, which brings us to a second lesson regarding it. Having seen its biblical reality, we see:

AN ABSOLUTELY-ESSENTIAL NEED OF OUR HEARTS IN DEALING WITH THIS APPARENT TENSION DURING OUR PRESENT LIVES.

Here I would direct you to two passages recording prayers of the Apostle Paul for Christians which underscore the great need of our hearts if we are to rightly love those around us:

First observe 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13:

¹¹Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. ¹²And **may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all**, just as we *do* to you, ¹³so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Here Paul by his prayer indicates that **it is the Lord alone ultimately who can make Christians increase and abound in love for other brethren, and for all men including their enemies**, so that their hearts may be established unblamable in holiness before God at the second coming of Christ. Only God can change and enlarge our natively selfish hearts so that we love all men with a kind, generous, general love, and love our Christian brethren with special delight. We are here called to pray for such workings of God in our own hearts and the hearts of our brethren, following the example of Paul.

Consider what are some of the characteristics of the love for which we should pray as described in Philippians 1:9-11:

⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

We once again are reminded that we desperately need the Lord to make our love abound still more and more - and we also learn that the love which we need is a love characterized by real knowledge and all discernment so that we may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless in preparation for Christ's return. Biblical love for others must be a knowledgeable, discerning love. We may not - we dare not - tolerate and accept all actions and kinds of character in men around us. Some are wicked and others are righteous. Among that which is in itself good, there is that which is more excellent than other. We so desperately need this discerning love when we wrestle with how to rightly show both kindness and loathing toward wicked men around us. And we can ultimately find it as given by our Father in heaven who is the great example and source of all love. But we must ask for it. How often it is true that we have not because we ask not.

Having underscored our great need of the living God to give us a fuller measure of discerning love towards others if we would ever rightly work out the seeming tension of loving our neighbor on this present sin-cursed

earth, we come to a third and final matter:

THE DIVINE RESOLUTION OF THIS APPARENT TENSION.

Hopefully, by this point it has become obvious why there is a seeming tension when it comes to loving our neighbor during our present lifetimes upon the earth. There are reasons why we must wrestle with various dimensions of God's love, and with the fact that two of those dimensions are unconditional while another is conditional. There are reasons why we wrestle with properly loving men around us, and why loathing and abhorring some men must also be an issue.

First of all, it is because sin and wickedness have broken into this world since the Fall of Adam into sin in the Garden of Eden. The sons of men whom God has made and in whom He delights have become His vile enemies.

Furthermore, we wrestle because even wicked men still manifest much of God's common grace in their earthly lives at present, and are not as hardened and wicked as they could be, and one day will be, if they remain in their present spiritual state.

And we also must wrestle because God's work of redeeming a new humanity for himself from the mass of lost humanity through the work of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, is still in progress and is not yet completed. We wrestle with apparent tensions in the matter of loving our fellow men aright because some of them are vile and wicked while others are among the saints, because some who are now wicked will yet become righteous, and because even the saints yet have much of remaining sin in their breasts. We are living in a mixed and changing situation at present as the Lord works out His redemptive purposes in a wicked world, and thus we live with tension.

But even as we wrestle, it is vital that we never forget that there is a divine resolution of this apparent tension which is certainly coming. The struggle of our souls will not go on forever.

1. This resolution has been guaranteed by God's eternal decree. From before the foundation of the world, the triune God purposed to redeem a new humanity from among the mass of fallen mankind because He delighted in mankind with a general, creational delight, and because He abhorred wickedness. He with electing love chose some unconditionally whom He would make righteous through the decreed work of His Son, and whom He would therefore ultimately make the objects of His whole-hearted delight. And He sovereignly decreed that others would not be saved, and would be forever removed from His earth and presence in eternal destruction when the heavens and earth were made anew.

2. This resolution was accomplished by Christ's cross work. Christ as He came to earth to die was the expression of the general love of God for all men so that He could be described as ". . . the true Light which gives light to every man . . ." (John 1:9a), especially through His life and words still recorded and preached in the Gospel. But as He hung on the cross, Jesus also was redeeming a specific people - those whom the Father had loved from before the foundation of the world with an electing love.

Jesus suffered crucifixion as the perfect Son of God who had daily been the delight of the Father back at creation (Proverbs 8:30), and as the spotless God-man of whom the Father had repeatedly from heaven declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17b; 17:5b). Yet wonder of wonders, this perfectly-holy Son in whom the Father rightly delighted with delighting love was, while He hung on the cross, being assaulted by the righteous loathing and rejection and wrath of His Father. Why? Why did the Father so treat His delightful Son? Because only the spotless Son could as a substitute bear the loathing and wrath of the Father which His elect ones so richly deserved. Only in this way could the Father begin to lovingly delight in these chosen sinful men as they believed in Christ and were forgiven for Christ's sake and received Christ's imputed righteousness.

In other words, **all three dimensions of God's love for men came together at the cross along with God's hatred of loathing toward wicked men.** On Golgotha, as it were, there was the great act which accomplished the resolution of the tension which seems to exist between the various forms of God's love for man. However, that great accomplishment has yet to be fully applied and worked out on this earth, which brings us to a third stage of the resolution of the tension:

3. **This resolution will be consummated by Christ's near return.** When Christ comes again, the wicked will be forever fixed in total wickedness without any common grace, and be cast away from the presence of God and His earth into eternal burnings; a new heavens and new earth will rise out of the old; all the elect righteous ones of God will be made perfectly holy, body and soul; and they will form the entirety of the new human race which will inhabit this recreated globe with God Himself delightingly and complacently dwelling in their midst. **In that day, all three forms of God's love for man will be obviously and fully united, and there will no longer be even an apparent tension in loving my neighbor. All the objects of God's electing love, and only they, will be the objects of God's general creational love and of God's delighting, responsive love. And the wicked will completely be objects of abhorrence, and in no way objects of love or delight.** For wickedness and the wicked will be forever removed from this earth.

This great resolution is indicated by the description of the new heavens and new earth with which the book of Isaiah concludes:

²² For as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I will make shall remain before Me,' says the LORD,
So shall your descendants and your name remain.
²³ And it shall come to pass
That from one New Moon to another,
And from one Sabbath to another,
All flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the LORD.
²⁴ And they shall go forth and look
Upon the corpses of the men
Who have transgressed against Me.
For their worm does not die,
And their fire is not quenched.
They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.'
(Isaiah 66:22-24)

It was in hope of this great resolution that David the Psalmist prayed as he did at the end of a psalm of praise to God for His creation (Psalm 104:35):

May sinners be consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more.
Bless the LORD, O my soul!
Praise the LORD!"

He was looking forward to this consummate resolution day when his soul would be at rest for all eternity toward His God and His fellow men with nary a cloud to dim the glory of the Father and Son dwelling with man in the New Jerusalem. He was looking forward to that grand resolution described so vividly in Revelation 21:1-8:

¹And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ²Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' ⁵Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' ⁶And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷**He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.** ⁸**But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'**

You see, **in that final day the main topic of our lengthy study - whether or not our love for men should be unconditional - will be irrelevant. For unconditional love and conditional love will have fully become one in their focus upon the righteous alone, with no apparent tension left between them. And the wicked will**

fully be the objects of loathing hatred. In a real sense, this consummate resolution is the most important detail of what God says about unconditional love. For your entire eternity hinges upon which side you will find yourself when the present tension due to sin is ultimately resolved.

Where will you find yourself on that great resolution day, my friend? Will you be among the righteous basking in the love of God the Father and God the Son? Or will you be found the eternal object of the loathing of the triune God and the universe?

For those of you who know you would be in hell if that day came right now, seek the Lord while He may be found. Repent of your nauseating wickedness, and embrace a Savior who gladly receives sinners.

Dear child of God, you have so much to which you may look forward. This present, grievous, wicked world will soon melt away into a universe of eternal peace and righteousness, and of the personal presence of the Lord Jesus for you. Persevere in faith a little longer, for your rest is coming, and it will be worth all the comparably minor difficulties which you must endure now. Bask in the light of that simple yet precious verse regarding the love of God which is a sure promise to your soul:

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)

NOTES

1. ¹*The Bakersfield Californian*, March 28, 1995, Sec. A, p. 1.
2. ²Martin and Deidre Bobgan, *Prophets of Psychoheresy II* (Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate Publishers, 1990), p. 83.
3. ³*Ibid.*, pp. 91-92
4. ⁴Jerry Cook, *Love, Acceptance & Forgiveness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), pp. 11 & 13.
5. ⁵*Trinity Hymnal* (Philadelphia, PA: Great Commission Publications, 1979), no. 142.
6. ⁶Greg Nichols, Doctrine of Man class notes (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Baptist School of Theology, Reformed Baptist Church), Lecture on Common Grace.
7. ⁷L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1976), p. 445.
8. ⁸Nichols, *op. cit.*
9. ⁹Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Mclean, VA: MacDonald Pub. Co. (1970's)), vol. V, p. 1117.
10. ¹⁰John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord* (Mac Dill AFB, FL: Tyndale Bible Society, (1970's?)), pp. 616-618.
11. ¹¹Johannes Vos, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., (1991)), pp. 47-48.
12. ¹²*Ibid.*, p. 50.
13. ¹³*Ibid.*, p. 50.
14. ¹⁴Douglas Wilson, "Devil with a Blue Dress," *Credenda Agenda*, VII (1995), 5.
15. ¹⁵F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1976), pp. 116-117.
16. ¹⁶John Calvin (transl. by John W. Fraser), *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1976), p. 103.
17. ¹⁷F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament -- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973), vol. VI, p. 193.
18. ¹⁸*Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 193.
19. ¹⁹Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Edinburgh, Scotland, Great Britain: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), vol. II, p. 228.
20. ²⁰*Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 228.
21. ²¹Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Mclean, VA: MacDonald Pub. Co. (1970's)), vol. IV, p. 858.
22. ²²*Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1965).
23. ²³William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary -- Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*

