

DOES GOD LOVE *EVERYONE*?

by
Paul Fahy

Preface

This study arose from questions asked by church leaders and young Bible students. There seems to be no available booklet or paper on this subject anywhere. Why is that I wonder? Is not this a crucial subject? The heart of the issue is our understanding of the character of God. This is the foundation of our theology and our walk in the Spirit. We must be true and Biblical in our conception of God or everything will go wrong. If God loves everyone, then he cannot hate anyone (including Satan, whom sinners are said to follow, Eph. 2:2, or be children of Jn. 8:44). This is patently unbiblical as God is said to hate some people. If God loves everyone, why should a sinner bother to get saved at all? God will not act outside his character, so a loving God cannot send people to hell. This concept is obviously preposterous and untrue. It was Jesus, the fullest representation of God's love, who spoke more about hell and judgment than anyone else.

What concerns me most is that, after reading the first draft of this paper, several leaders commented that, though they could not disprove any of the arguments, they would refuse to accept the conclusion! They could offer no Biblical proof for their position, but were determined to continue to teach something that was evidently unscriptural and false. The grip of this idea - that God loves all people, at all times, in all places, without exception - forces people to act in an unbiblical fashion.

Furthermore, many Christian agencies are becoming almost frantic over the consistent failure of evangelistic efforts (excepting perhaps, the Alpha course for which more assessment is needed to judge its fruit). The Evangelical Alliance's magazine, IDEA, announced in a main article title that 'Evangelism Isn't Working' (IDEA Jan-March 1996). More and more churches are adopting experience or performance based meetings and dropping proclamation in the hope that people will listen, it seems that they are not.

Is it not time to re-examine the popular message that most Christians utilise in witnessing to see if it is correct? The God Loves You approach is not only unbiblical,

it is a fairly recent invention that was not the message of the early church and is not working.

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(NOTE: All ref. footnotes in brackets ref. to *Bibliographies p.14.*)

WHY STUDY THIS?

We need to look at this question in view of the apparent contradiction between common evangelistic witnessing methods and Biblical statements. Nowhere in the Old or New Testament do we find the phrase: 'God loves all men' (i.e. mankind). Yet on every hand we see Christians confidently telling enquirers that 'God loves you', or worse: 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life'. This might seem like nit picking were it not for the fact that in a number of places in the Bible we are told that God hates sinners. God hates workers of iniquity, man is hostile to God, there is enmity between man and God, God's wrath is abiding upon those who do not believe etc.

It is obvious that we need to be careful here to avoid misrepresenting God or even blaspheming. If God hates sinners, who dares to tell an individual that God loves him specifically. On the other hand, we are certain that God loves a fallen creation so much that he sent his son to die to provide a redemption for man and nature.

NEW METHODS?

It is concerning that, in this century, we are seeing a presentation of the Gospel that is significantly different from the historical method. It is common for people to be assured of their salvation simply because they raised their hand at a gospel service, or came to the front in a high powered evangelistic campaign or prayed a written prayer without any previous heart preparation, or prayed a prayer dictated by someone else. Where is repentance in all this? Repentance, as a result of deep conviction of sin prompted by the Holy Spirit, is a condition for salvation, yet it is noticeably missing.

It should not surprise us, therefore, that official figures of certain campaigns show an 80% fall away rate for professed conversions. Nor should we be shocked at the general dearth of deep spiritual life, coupled with the desire for emotional experiences in many churches. The increasing level, and growing serious nature of counselling requirements in English churches, seems also to follow in the wake of inadequate counselling for salvation. Many counselling sessions for long term problems

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stem from this. Other churches contain significant proportions of unbelievers who presume they are saved and get carried away with the emotionalism only to fall away later on.

Friends, we cannot ignore this question, the results of wrong teaching are serious and long lasting. It is thought to be much easier to witness by telling a person that God loves them rather than by telling them they are guilty before God and will go to hell unless they repent and put their trust in God's provided saviour - the Lord Jesus Christ. But is it right?

As with all doctrines, we have to start with God. We must understand the clear statements of scripture concerning God's eternal purpose in salvation. We cannot let our feelings or mental baggage get in the way. We must simply let the word of God mould us. Ambiguous scriptures must then be interpreted in the light of the analogy of the whole Biblical teaching. This is sound interpretation which no one would argue with. Let's apply it to this question.

This study will look at the support for both sides of the question, evaluate its meaning and establish the way forward.

A. ARGUMENTS PUT FORWARD TO SHOW THAT GOD LOVES ALL MEN

1. Man is made in the Image of God, therefore, God can love all men.

In other words, there is something of God in everyone that enables Him to love them, however not enough to ensure salvation without atonement.

Evangelicals have to steer carefully away from universalism (i.e. the teaching that all men will be saved) in making this deduction. To assert that God loves an individual when witnessing to him, who then rejects the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a frightening prospect. A sinner at the day of judgment will have a just complaint against a Christian, representing God, who told him that God loves him but is then condemned to hell.

It is very difficult to assert this and not, at least, be guilty of implying universalism to the enquirer. If God loves everyone, why are not all people saved? It is a poor theological foundation on which to preach the Gospel especially if it produces complacency in the sinner. If God loves him, what has he to fear?

If we ignore this danger for now, how can it be said that God finds something to

love in a sinner because his image is contained in all men? Does this mean that something of God is in hell in all the sinners sent there? Obviously not. What then is this image? Clearly the image of God in man is not spiritual since fallen man's spirit is dead towards God (Eph. 2:1,5). These verses also make clear that there is no communication between fallen man and God since worship is spiritual (Jn. 4:24). The image must, therefore be soulish or of the body. Since the body cannot represent a spirit, the image must be of the soul. The only alternative is that the image was something created in Adam which was entirely lost after the fall (Luther's view).

Only in 1 Cor. 11:7 do we see this term in the NT referring in general terms to man as a representative of God. However, Paul is here talking to Christians and even so it is in the context of creation. Other references refer to believers (e.g. Col. 3: 10, Eph. 4:24), or redeemed people in glory (Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor.15:49). Luther's view could thus be argued. [Jam. 3:9 uses the term 'likeness' (homoiosis in Greek not image: eikon) which means resemblance and is a weaker word.]

However, most theologians would identify God's image as existing in the soul of man. The intellect, affections and volition raise man above the animal kingdom and, in the same way reflects the nature of God. Essentially, man as a rational being with a moral nature reveals, in a marred way, something of the nature of God.(1)

Having said all that, in what way is this relevant to the argument? It does not assist in any way. Sinners, with this image will go to hell and all agree that God's love cannot be on someone in hell. The ground of God's love to man cannot be based upon his image in man. A love of justice and goodness may elevate man above the animals but at the fall, man ceased to be a perfect vessel to represent God and, as fallen, God's love cannot rest upon him. In any case, Eph. 2 tells us that man is dead towards God and Jn. 3:18,36 explains that God's wrath is already upon non believers. Clearly, the image of God in man does not prevent God's anger being upon him and cannot be a ground for his love.

2. God is loving to all He has created, therefore He loves all.

Texts utilised in support of this are hard to find. An example is Ps 145:9: 'The Lord is good to all and his compassion is over all that he has made'. This proves nothing, however, because it is too broad. Men still go to hell despite this compassion, so this love cannot be a love to salvation or which incorporates a 'wonderful plan for your life'.

Let's look at this Psalm: Firstly, it does not say that God loves all men or all that he has made. (NOTE: the NIV translation of v 13b that God is 'loving to all he has made', is not found in the majority of manuscripts. Only one manuscript of the Masoretic text has this statement. It seems quite irresponsible, therefore, to include it.) God's compassion, pity or mercy is over all that he created. In an outpouring of praise, David lists some of God's great actions towards his creation (vv 5-8) and his

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abundant goodness (v.7). The Psalm speaks of God's providence which preserves both the evil and good (Mt. 5:45). God preserves the world and all in it without distinction in his providential ordering of nature, so 'the eyes of all look to thee and thou givest them their food in due season' etc. (vv 15-17).

However, even here there is a distinction between the elect and the non-elect: God is only near to those who call upon him in truth, those that fear him (vv 18-19). He saves those who cry to him and love him, but the wicked he destroys (vv 19-20). So even this Psalm sets forth a distinction between the sheep and goats, if you like, and also between his love and anger (v.8). This Psalm cannot be interpreted to say that God loves the wicked or all men. All that can be said is that God is good to all and compassionate (pitiful) even to his enemies whom he hates and is angry with.

Even if it could be said that God loves all that he has made, does that enable us to say to an individual: 'God loves you'? There is a clear difference between the two. The fact that God's love controls nature for the good of all men, wicked and righteous, shows that he is a loving being even to those in rebellion to him. It cannot enable us to say that God's saving love is towards all men personally. Theologians often distinguish two or three kinds of love in God when considering this subject. Although this may be helpful in some ways to analyse what the Bible says about God, there is clearly only one attribute of God called love. This is shown generally in a love for his creation by which he desires to sustain it and rebuild it at the time of nature's redemption; his love is also shown specifically to some individuals which the Bible clearly distinguishes as the elect. A man may have a love for all dogs but has a special and specific love for his own dog in a way that is different to all others. You cannot apply the force of the specific to the general.

3. Jesus commands us to love our enemies thus showing that we are sons of God (Matt. 5 : 44 - 45).

In other words, God loves his enemies, therefore we can say that God loves all men. We must be careful in our interpretation of this passage. It also says that we must pray for those who persecute us but God does not pray for the world that persecutes the church (Jn. 17:9), or Satan- his enemy. This passage is saying that God preserves all mankind: 'he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, he sends rain on the just and the unjust' (v.45). God's providence is sovereign over all creation. The fact that God's goodness keeps nature safe from chaos and preserves the balance of life for all living creatures does not allow us to interpret that as a father's love for all men as his children. Again the fact that many will go to hell in condemnation proves that this cannot be the case.

The passage emphasises God's good character. In compassion he preserves all life on earth, most of which is in rebellion to him and hostile to his purpose. Despite this hate towards him by his creatures, he still allows their lives to continue as normal and does not wipe out the earth to start again. He is infinitely patient.

Since this is true of God, all Christians should react similarly to those that hate

them. They cannot preserve or control the environment of their enemies but they can show love and turn the other cheek, go the second mile and give their coat.

We cannot turn this command around and say - since Christians are to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors that God loves Satan (his enemy) and prays for his welfare. The parallel passage in Luke 6:27-36 adds the action of lending money, again this cannot be turned around to refer to God. The passage is making a general exhortation to Christians on the basis of the overall character of God who is good to a wicked creation. We should also note the passage in Rm. 12:17-21. We act like God by returning good for evil treatment. This is love. However, this action of love does not indicate that there is anything worthy of love in the enemy. In fact, God says that he will repay vengeance on the enemy after we have loved him. Our good actions result in heaping burning coals upon the enemy's head. Those we love are not loved by God.

If these verses are forced to say that God loves his enemies since his children (the lesser) cannot be able to do something which God (the greater) cannot, then at best it must be a reference to the elect. God shows, therefore, his love to the elect whilst they are in actual fact hostile to God before they find faith in Christ. It cannot mean that God loves sinners which his word everywhere says he hates (see **B2** p.10.).

4. God both loves and hates sinners at the same time. Either:

a) he loves the person but hates the sin, or : b) he loves and hates absolutely but if a person repents, the love covers the hate and the sinner finds salvation.

Firstly, God everywhere attributes sin to the sinner. It is the soul that sins which will die (Ezek. 18:4). Sin is endemic in the heart of the person (Jer. 17:9). You cannot separate the corruption from the corrupted person. Furthermore the phrase 'God loves the sinner but hates the sin' is not found in the Bible and its sentiments are unbiblical.

The concept in b) also finds no basis in scripture and does not assist evangelistic counselling anyway. Of what use is it to tell someone that God loves and hates them at the same time? There is no clarity in this position. If God loves all men, then he hates no one. Furthermore, if repentance changes God's actions from hate to love, this makes man able to control God. God becomes dependent upon a person repenting in order to love them. This is an insult to God who is 'terrible in majesty' and Lord over all that he has made. He purposes whom he will love.

It is true that Jesus told us to love our enemies, but not to hate them at the same time, so Matt. 5:45 is no help here. We have just made the point that we cannot evaluate God's character on the basis of his commands to his creatures in any case.

Everything God does has finality in view, it has a purposeful end. If he loves, the end is glorification, if he hates the end is condemnation. God does nothing without final purpose. He cannot love and hate the same person at the same time just as he cannot tell the truth and lie.

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The Bible says that God is love, but it does not say that God is hate. Arthur Custance has illustrated this with the analogy of light and darkness (2). Darkness is the absence of light. It is not a thing in itself. Perhaps we could imply that hate is the absence of love. Just as you cannot have darkness and light in the same room at the same time, similarly God cannot love and hate at the same time.

When we read in Scripture of divine hatred it seems necessary that we not consider it as an active principle, vindictive in its nature and destructive in its expression. It is simply that no light goes on (in the reprobate person PF), no life results, no love is experienced. Darkness overwhelms the soul, and death - and hatred ... the hatred of God is without the vindictive quality of human hostility.
(3)

5. Jn. 3:16 says that God loves the whole world, therefore He must love all men.

A full exposition of this would take far too long for this paper. There have been various explanations of this verse to show that there are limitations on this love. These include:

i) The word 'world' is used in various senses even in John's gospel:

a) In Jn. 12:19 it says that 'the world has gone after him'. Obviously the Pharisees did not mean every nation but a relatively few people in a country the size of Wales. It does not mean all men here.

b) Jesus in Jn. 17:3-9 says that he does not pray for the world but for those given to him by the Father, i.e. those loved by God are a portion of the human race, not all men.

It is obvious that Jesus is praying for those whom God loves. These people are not the world, not all men but those given to Jesus by God.

c) We are told by John not to love the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17) yet Jn. 3:16 says that God loves the world. Again it is obvious that the word 'world' refers to two different things. One world God loves, the other is an enemy to the believer and is perishing.

d) Furthermore Jn. 15:18-21 explains that this world hates believers as it hated Jesus. Believers are not of this world and are chosen by Jesus (v.16) out of it. There is a difference between this 'world' and God's people.

e) Jn. 1:29 Christ did not take away the sins of the whole world or all men would be saved. The context and analogy of scripture must be applied to understand each reference of the word 'world'.

ii) **All that God loves will remain (4)**, nothing that God loves can be lost in hell. Since many are condemned to hell, the word 'world' cannot mean all men.

iii) **With one exception, the word 'world' in John's gospel is the Greek word 'kosmos'**. It originally meant ornament, but came to mean: *order, arrangement, beauty* (from which we get *cosmetics*) in the sense of good orderly appearance. Pythagoras used it to refer to the ordered arrangement of the universe. From this it came to refer to the external framework where man lives and is the moral centre. From this it came to mean all men or all who are alienated from God. Scripture uses all of these meanings (4). The general meaning then is: '*orderly arrangement*' or even *harmony, an organic whole*. When it refers to mankind it always involves man as organically related to the orderly creation.

In Jn. 3: 16, therefore, the word world can simply mean the total of the elect as an organic whole. We've seen that it cannot mean all men, therefore, it must mean all those saved in Christ.

God created the world and mankind to reflect his holiness and character. The fall did not ruin this plan since God the Father covenanted with his son before time began to rescue an ordered whole, a world, of people who would love him. These Christ would die for. He is still building this unity of people (the church, a people called out of the evil world) to form a new world, a *kosmos*, of people who serve their God in holiness and beauty. This world God loves. This is the world Jesus died for. (We should not forget that creation is also in view in this world Rm. 8:19-23).

iv) **John emphasises the word 'world' in this passage to show that it is not only Jews who will be saved.** Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus who, like all Jews, believed that God's mercy was only for Israel (see Amos 3:2). Jesus is proclaiming that salvation is now available for all nations (as was supposed to be the case if Israel had obeyed God and acted as his missionary). God's love is broader than Israel, it is for the whole world, all nations.

v) **If 'world' here meant all men, it contradicts many scriptures which declare that millions of men died in their sins and were lost.** 'All men' must include all men of past generations as well as future. It would include the world of men, for instance, that died in the flood which the Bible says clearly was a world of sinners which God hated, or the people of the Canaanite nations which Israel was to utterly destroy because God hated their iniquity.

vi) **If 'world' means 'all men' then God gave his son for all men,** Jesus died for all men without exception, however, it is clear that many are lost. God's love, therefore, has failed to save all men. Jesus died for people who still perished. God has failed. This obviously cannot be true.

Commenting on this verse Calvin says: 'While life is promised universally to all

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who believe in Christ, still faith is not common to all. For Christ is made known and held out to the view of all, but the elect alone are they whose eyes God opens, that they may seek him by faith'. (5).

B. WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL POSITION? WHOM DOES GOD LOVE AND HATE?

1. God hates Sinners?

Scripture is literally full of references to the negative effects of the Fall on mankind and its terrible effect of separating man from God. Man has now become God's enemy because firstly, he is dominated by sin, which God hates; and secondly, he is allied to Satan - God's adversary.

Eph. 2 makes this situation very clear. It describes man as:

- dead towards God (vv 1, 5)
- hostile to God (v.16)
- separated Far from God (vv 12, 17) (i.e. there is no love relationship at all)
- a stranger to God's covenant (v.12)
- no hope and without God (v.12)
- following the devil (v.2)
- following bodily desires (v.3)
- a child of God's wrath (v.3)

If the man pictured here is still in God's image, God's love is nowhere to be seen upon man in his natural state.

John's gospel also makes this clear:

- sinners *Do not have the love of God* in them Jn. 5:42 These same people did not receive him (v.43), they received others (v.43) and could not believe (v.44) and would be judged (v.45)
- sinners *are condemned already* Jn. 3:18, 36 (see also 2 Cor. 4:3)
- sinners do not believe because *they are not of Jesus' sheep* Jn. 10:24-27
- sinners *are not of God's family*, they are related (spiritually) to Satan Jn 8: 39-43
- sinners *are not of the people given to Jesus* Jn. 17:2, 6, 9-10
- sinners *are not joined to Christ* Jn. 17:23-26
- sinners do not come to Christ and *are cast out* Jn. 6:37
- sinners *do not know God* Jn. 7:28, 8:19
- sinners *die in their sin* Jn. 8:24

Many more such references could be added.

The Old Testament has many texts which refers to God's hate and condemnation

for sinners, e.g.:

- Ps 5:4-5 God hates workers of iniquity
- Ps 11: 5-6 God hates violent men and wicked men
- Ps 34:21 God condemns the wicked
- Ps 37:20 the wicked are God's enemies
- Ps 37:38 the wicked shall be destroyed
- Ps 45:7 God hates wickedness and is continually angry (Ps 7:11)
- Prov. 3:33 God blesses the abode of the righteous but a curse is upon the house of the wicked
- Mal. 1:2-3 God hates specific people

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God loves all men indiscriminately. Only if it did could Christians tell enquirers that God loved them. There are references to God loving sinners who turn from their sin and believe in Jesus, but how does a Christian know that this will happen to the person they are talking to? In other words - we cannot tell who the elect are in evangelism.

2. How do we explain that God loves some but hates others?

The answer is election.

God is outside time. The sinner is under wrath and condemnation from eternity. The elect person is part of God's covenant from before time, just as Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world. Before conversion, Christians are preserved by angels until they inherit salvation by receiving faith (Heb 1: 14).

Various scriptures make this election of some people to salvation clear:

Rm. 9: 11- 13 God's purpose of election is to ensure the salvation of a race of people to show his love and mercy and grace. Before they have done anything, some are chosen by his good pleasure, not because of their future good works. Others are passed by and thus remain in their sinful state. This is all mercy on God's part as his justice would require all to be condemned for their sin. He chooses to send his son to die for the sins of those chosen before time.

The example of Jacob and Esau, in this passage, makes this clear. Before they were born Jacob was called and loved, but Esau was hated. Simply saying that 'hated' means 'love less' does not alter the fact that some are vessels created for destruction v.22. The word hate and the word for love are the usual words for these emotions used elsewhere in the Bible. Eg. the word hate is the same word used in Jn. 15:25 - a hate strong enough to lead to murder!

Acts 13:48 Those that were ordained by God to eternal life believed and were

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saved in Antioch.

Eph. 1: 4-5 Christians are chosen in Christ before the world was made and predestined to be God's sons.

1 Cor. 1:26-31 Those found in the church, the body of Christ, are those chosen by God.

2 Tim. 1:9 Christians are saved because God the father called them as a result of his purpose before time. The grace which results in conversion through the gift of faith was given in Christ before time also.

God decreed before time began who would be saved and who would not. In his mercy, he selected some for life and others were passed by. He did not need to save anyone but he chose to love some. From that point his wrath rested upon sinners (the reprobate) and his grace and love upon the elect. People who do not believe fail to believe because they are not elect (Jn. 10:24-27), i.e. God does not love them. Jesus continually separated sheep from goats by his very presence and ministry.

Jesus does not become a saviour to those who believe but comes to save his people, those given to him by his Father from eternity (Jn. 17:2, 6, 9-10). Those people are not of this world (Jn. 17:14,16, note this is before Calvary and Pentecost). These people are loved by God as in Christ (Jn. 17:23, 26)

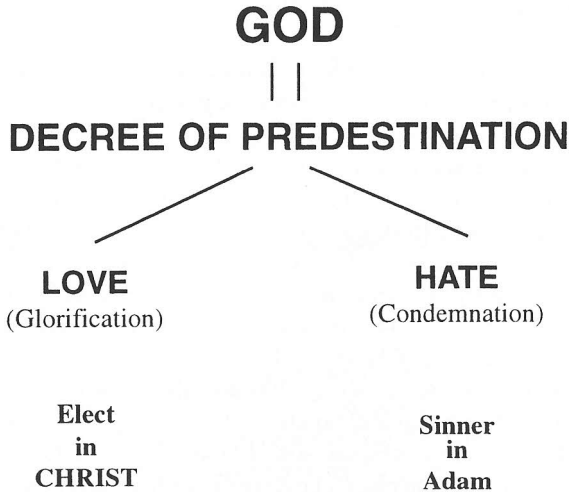
The love of God is eternal, he always has and always will love his people. His love for them has no beginning and no end (1 Jn. 4:9, Jer. 31:3). All God's love is focused upon Christ, he is the beloved son of God (Mt. 17:5). Only those in Christ (potentially or actually) i.e. the elect, can have God's love upon them. God's love is positional: if you are in Christ, you are loved by God. Only the elect were put into Christ before time, (Rev. 13: 8)

To say 'God loves you' to a non-elect person is to misrepresent God. God loves his own, and only his own in Christ, before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:3-5), this love is ours 'IN CHRIST' (Eph. 1:3). His love was predestined to us (Eph. 1:5). God's love cannot remain upon a man in his depravity. God's love is on those elect that have not yet received Christ as Lord because they are seen as eternally in Christ, just as in the same way that Christians are seen as glorified though we are obviously not yet actually glorified (Rm. 8:30) or just as the Old Testament saints were saved by their faith in Christ before Calvary. Similarly God's love is upon true Christians that have backslidden because he has promised to preserve them to the end. Though they sin, God still loves them even if his love reflects off their back and not their face. They have turned their back upon their Father but he still loves them because they are his children, even if they are wayward children. His love will not only preserve them but will also chastise them as sons to bring about a return to grace through repentance in God's time. In this sense God loves sinners, i.e.

Christians who sin. The promises to God's children cannot be transferred to the reprobate.

John makes this clear in 1Jn. 5. God's love is only upon those that know God, and as a result of knowing God, they also show love to others (1 Jn. 5:7-11). Those that do not love (i.e. the non-elect) do not know God and do not have God's love. God's love is for those to whom he sent his son to be the propitiation of their sins (1 Jn. 5: 10).

Diagrammatically, this can be shown as:



To suggest that God's love turns away (propitiates) the wrath coming upon a person is wrong. It is Jesus' blood which propitiates (Rm. 3:25) which shows God's righteousness and grace on the basis of faith. God's love for the elect is revealed in the provision of a sacrifice (Rm. 5:8) which saves the elect from wrath.

God's wrath is already upon sinners, they were ordained for condemnation (Jude v.4). God's love is already upon the elect (the lamb was slain before the foundation of the world) even if they are not yet converted.

How can God fight against himself? The only time God's wrath and love was on a man was at the cross, but even then God withdrew his love from Jesus for the duration of judgment - an event so shocking that it caused silence in heaven (Rev 8:1).

God's love is effectual, since it is of God it has an inherent power. God's attributes always end in a successful conclusion: his will cannot be broken, it achieves its

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end, his power cannot be withstood. Similarly his love has an object - the Bride of Christ. It is set upon a people to be presented to his son. God's love is not some vague emotion available to all who choose it like a lifebelt thrown aimlessly into the sea. No! it has an object - the elect. It ensures the salvation of those people because salvation originates in God's love (Deut. 7:7-8, Eph. 2:4-5). God's love is therefore a saving love. God's love cannot fail to achieve its end - the procuring of a saved people. As a result of this love, the elect are drawn to God (Jer. 31:3). God's love cannot fail, it cannot be resisted since it is sovereign, it is the love of the Most High God.

Since this is true, God cannot be said to love everyone. God cannot love those who are not elect for then God's love would not be sovereign and would have failed in its purpose. God's love is only known by his people, his sheep, his bride. Therefore, God's anger and wrath must rest upon the goats, the reprobate, those in hell. (Ps 11:5, 5:5, 7:11, Jn. 3:36). It is those who God foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified that cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rm. 8:28-30, 39) **'Christ loved the church and gave himself for it'**. Eph. 5:25.

CONCLUSION

It has to be wrong to tell an unbeliever that God loves him or her. That is not to say that the Gospel is not good news. The good news is that there is a sacrifice for sins, there is an escape from death, there is the provision of eternal life, there is mercy, there is the opportunity for a relationship with God. The good news is that we can receive these as we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour and master. There is lots of good news but it is dangerous to presume that everyone you speak to is an elect person and say: 'God loves you'.

Similarly, we should make it very clear to believers that God, of a certainty, loves them deeply, that this love was for them from the beginning of time, that God is a loving Father who has preserved their whole life from harm right to the point of their conversion and now longs for fellowship with them.

God's love is too precious for us to despise.

All agree that God's love is supremely manifested at the cross. It was there that God showed his love for man by sending his son to die in his place. What greater love can there be than to die for rebels to your authority. However, all also agree that the cross initiates a separation, it divides the sheep and the goats, those that respond to God's call and those that reject it, the elect and the reprobate. Since this is the case, we can suggest that God's love in action results in separation in practice.

God's love is linked to the expression of his power. The gospel is the outward expression of that love and the Gospel is expressly spoken of as being the power of God unto salvation (Rm. 1:16). Just as God's power to save is only applied to some, so his love is particular and not universal. God's love in salvation separates the sheep from the goats. God's love from eternity has been for his elect, his wrath is to

the reprobate.

“Benevolence is the goodness of God viewed generically. It embraces his creatures, except the judicially condemned on account of sin, and provides for their welfare ...

“God’s mercy, of which the more passive forms are pity and compassion, is the divine goodness exercised with respect to the miseries of his creatures, feeling for them, and making provision for their relief, and in the case of impenitent sinners, leading to long suffering patience.” (6)

Perhaps we should seriously consider a verse in the Old Testament as we close. In 2 Chron. 19:2, a godly king was rebuked and condemned for making a mistake. What was this mistake? Jehoshaphat had not hated Ahab, but had loved him. The prophet Jehu declared that wrath was upon him because he had loved the wicked king Ahab. The obvious point is that God could not have loved Ahab if he condemned Jehoshaphat for loving him. God does not vacillate in his opinions. HE EITHER LOVES OR HATES FULLY AND COMPLETELY. We must take care how we represent him to others.

Can we profit from all this or are we just being contentious and fastidious? Is it worth arguing about anyway? Yes, and for this reason. Current Christianity has lost its reverence and fear of God in many places. Since this is the beginning of wisdom, it is not surprising that a lack of doctrinal understanding has accompanied this debasing of God’s character and authority. The starting place for a fresh move of God in the church and the country is a restoration of the honour of God in believers. We must see a return to an emphasis on the sovereignty of God in all things. As Christians put their Lord first and trust in his divine purpose behind all circumstances, we will see a return to righteous behaviour. We must, above all else, learn more about our Father if we are to become obedient children. This means recovering Biblical truth about his attributes and abandoning teachings and practices that are rooted in sentimentality and not scripture.

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- 1 Eg Calvin, see L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Banner of Truth (1971), pp.203-206.
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Does God love Everyone?

Appendix I

(Bracketed numbers ref. to notes near top p.16)

WORD STUDIES

LOVE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(numbers refer to Strong's Code)

חֶסֶד **CHESED 2617** (Love, mercy, loving kindness, also eagerness, steadfastness)

- In all its varied shades of meaning it is conditional upon there **being a covenant**. 'Without the prior existence of a covenant, there could never be a *chesed* at all' **(1)**
- Very similar to Greek *χαρις* : *charis* (grace)
- There has to be a recognised tie between the parties for *chesed* to be used
- It is used of men as well as God

Ps 145 has *chesed* in v.8 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love' (i.e. toward his people) but *rachamim* (i.e. *râcham* 7355: compassion, kindness, pity) in v.9 'his tender mercies are all over that he made'. 'It is a remarkable fact that the word *chasiyd* (2623, the adjectival form of *chesed*) when applied to man...(indicates) that the persons... belong in a special sense to God... they are regarded as God's own... they show their love to the Lord by hating evil' **(2)**

אהבה **'AHABAH 157** (Love, affection trans. by ἀγάπη : Agape in LXX)

- Unconditional love, not limited by covenant conditions but only by the will of the lover. '*Ahabah* is the cause of the covenant between God and Israel, *chesed* is the means of its continuance. '*Ahabah* is God's **election love**.
- When used for Israel's love it is a conditional, dutiful love
- It is used of the sex relationship
- It is wrong to suggest that there has to be something worth loving in the loved one (e.g. God's image) to make us worthy of God's love **(3)**

I can find no reference of '*ahabah* or *chesed* used by God to sinners (i.e. reprobates) The general benevolence of God = '*ahabah*, the covenant love of God = *chesed*.

Other words for love: *Yediyd* 3039, *Rea'* 7453, '*Aqab* 5689, *Chashaq* 2836, *Dowdiym* 1730. Other words translated as love in LXX, *eleos* 1656 i.e. mercy, sometimes righteousness 1343 also 1654, 1680, 3741.

The Gospel presentation must be careful not to suggest God's covenant love or election love is upon a specific person who has not shown repentance. His mercy is over

all, his pity and compassion are to all, but his love is for the elect with whom he enters into a covenant of loving kindness and grace.

1. N Snaith. *Distinctive Ideas of the OT*; Epworth Press (1945); p.95.
2. R.B. Girdlestone. *Synonyms of the OT*; Baker (1983); p.31.
3. Snaith; op. cit. p.137.

Appendix 2

DOES GOD DESIRE THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN?

(Bracketed numbers ref. to Bibliography top p. 21.)

If God does not love all men, does the Bible imply that he desires to save them? Some texts seem to categorically state that God does indeed desire all men to be saved. However, we have seen that other texts specifically deny this. Both cannot be correct. In clear statements (e.g., Rm. 9) God says the purpose of election of some to life and others to death depends upon his call, not upon future works of a person who has not yet been born. Some are vessels of wrath, others are vessels of mercy, therefore, the passages which seem to imply that God desires all men to be saved cannot mean that. God chose some in eternity and, although he does not desire anyone's death, in his mercy he has elected some to life. Others are left in their sin to demonstrate God's justice.

These people chose to die because they chose to sin and continually reject the Gospel. God does not force them to sin and does not enjoy their condemnation, but as the great judge - he will do right. His election of some glorifies God in his love and mercy, his allowance for others to continue in sin shows his justice and wrath. Since God determined this he would not inspire Biblical writers to deny this by stating his desire to save all. We must look at each passage to determine the correct meaning.

Rm. 5:18 'One man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men'

This cannot mean what it seems at first sight or Paul would be preaching a universal salvation which his writings everywhere deny (even earlier in this letter 1:16, 17, 3:21-25, 5:17). The context, as always, must interpret the specific statement and thus restricts the implication. The condemnation is obviously not inclusive: one man's trespass led to condemnation for: 'all men' (Rm. 5:18) since Jesus was excepted and there is no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus (Rm. 8:1). Likewise not all are acquitted. Paul's argument concerns the parallel between the way of condemnation and Justification.

Does God love Everyone?

'All who are condemned..are condemned because of the one trespass of Adam, all who are justified are justified because of the righteousness of Christ'. (1) cf. 1 Cor. 15: 22-23.

As in other passages, Paul is using strong expressions (all) to make clear to Jews that salvation is given to gentiles as well. (see 1:16-17, 2:7-11, 3:21-24, 28-30, 4:3-16, 9:8, etc.).

To maintain consistency within this letter or Paul's doctrine of salvation, 'all men' must refer to those in Christ, all those in this covenant group.

The NT has many passages which use the term 'all' or 'all men' in a restrictive way eg Jn. 3:26: 'all men came to him', Lk. 2:1: 'all the world should be taxed', Eph. 1:10, Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:4, etc. The context must be the guide to the breadth of the term. The 'all' is all those that have faith having been called by God the Father (so also Rm. 11:32).

1 Cor. 15:22 ' For as in Adam all die,so also in Christ shall all be made alive'.

This is a similar passage to the previous one, it compares the result of being in Christ over against being in Adam. Those in Adam will die and be condemned, those in Christ shall live and be glorified. The very sense of the text is destroyed if it is made to say that all men are saved. All men can't die if all men do live. The statement becomes ludicrous. Paul's statement must be read as part of his argument and balanced style (note the parallels vv 20-22). Verse 22b should not be extracted to be read on its own as a foundation for a doctrinal stance. Very few serious commentators would disagree with this interpretation. In Christ all believers will be made alive just as in Adam all sinners will die.

1 Tim. 2:3-6 (God) 'desires all men to be saved ...Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all'

Titus 2:11 'the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men'

Again the rule of seeing these verses in their immediate context and comparing the statement with the analogy of scripture must be maintained. By itself 'all men' seems to apply to every man, woman and child in the world. If this were true we are again faced with a universal salvation which we know from the rest of the NT is not the case. Paul himself particularly denies this.

We have also seen earlier that 'all' and 'all men' is frequently a restricted term. Further examples are:

- a) every individual did not regard John the Baptist as a prophet Mk. 11:32
- b) every individual did not marvel about the Gadarene demoniac Mk. 5:20
- c) every individual did not wonder whether John was Christ Lk.3: 15
- d) everyone in the world was not searching for Jesus Mk. 1:37
- e) all individuals were not flocking to Jesus Jn. 3:26

It is common for us to say that everyone is doing such and such a thing but not mean all people.

In these passages the term 'all men' refers to all classes and types of people. It includes kings as well as paupers. The Timothy passage could not mean all individuals as it was not possible to pray for every person upon earth. Salvation is not restricted to certain types of people. It incorporates all classes of men and women, of all races, of all ages, rich or poor. (NB that the 'all men' in Titus 1:11 = 'us' in Titus 1:12.)

The ransom of Christ, being paid by his blood, is fully sufficient for all men, but the efficacy of it is only applied by God to those who believe, i.e. those chosen by God before time. Christ's blood is the most precious thing in the universe. Its value is incalculable and could easily atone for all but is only applied to the elect for the reasons mentioned earlier.

The statement that God desires or wishes all men to be saved has been interpreted by some (eg. Poole, Barnes) to be an example of God's innate character rather than his decretive will. God wills in an absolute sense by decreeing e.g., the creation of the world. His decretive will is always done. But God also has desires that are not achieved e.g., that his creatures should be happy because that is in accordance with his nature and he made abundant provision for their happiness.

God wills that sickness should be relieved, and sorrow mitigated, and that the oppressed go free, because it is agreeable to his nature; though it is not true that he wills it in the sense that he exerts his absolute power to produce it. A parent wills the welfare of his child. It is in accordance with his nature...(but) if the child is not virtuous, it is his own fault. (2)

When it said in the text that God will have all men to be saved...and in the same sense 2Pt 3:9 we must understand it not with respect to his decretive will but to his complacential will, that is the repentance and life of a sinner is very pleasing to his holiness and mercy. (3)

God willeth, to wit, with a will whereby he inviteth, and putteth no bar; not with a will whereby he effecteth it (4)

If it is complained that God's desires must have a final conclusion as we have stated his love must, how can this be true?

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God's innate desires of character, e.g., for happiness and health to prevail, will have a final conclusion for we are told that these are the characteristics of heaven Rev. 22:2, 3, 21:4. We can only explain on the basis of revelation; we know God's desires for the good of man are ultimately established in the new earth, however, God must also have his justice vindicated. This does not make him happy but man by nature will not repent, consequently, God chooses (elects) some to salvation to satisfy his desire.

2Pt. 3:9 'The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance'

Ezek. 33:11 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.'

Ezek. 18:23 'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live.'

This follows on from our last discussion. God welcomes all who repent from their sin and turn to him - but not all do so! These texts can be interpreted as referring to the elect whilst in their wicked state, i.e., God is not willing that any he has ordained to life, though not yet converted, should perish but that all his people should come to repentance. The day of judgment is deferred until the full number of the elect is complete.

Alternatively, this may refer to God's prescriptive will (i.e., will of command) whereby he calls all to repentance and prescribes one way of salvation, as opposed to God's decretive and effectual will (i.e., will of decree, purpose) whereby he saves a specific number.

God does not desire the death of anyone and has chosen some to eternal life despite their headlong rush towards hell in his great mercy. The death of his own son gave him no pleasure, but he allowed it because it glorified himself. God genuinely doesn't enjoy the death of anyone, but since all men by nature refuse him, he has sovereignly chosen some to life

Such passages simply assert the essential benevolence of God. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He does take pleasure in the salvation of men. Yet as a matter of fact, in perfect consistency with his benevolence, for reasons sufficient, though not revealed to us, he has provided no redemption for lost angels, and no efficacious grace for the non-elect of mankind. These passages simply assert that if it were not for these reasons, it would be agreeable to his benevolent nature that all men should be saved. (5)

2 Cor 5: 14-15 'He died for all'

The context clearly is not speaking of every person. Paul is talking to all who 'no

longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised'. Jesus died for all of us (Christians) so that we might die to ourselves. 'To die to ourselves is to live to Christ' (6)

1 Jn. 2:2 'He is the expiation for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world'.

John is clear that the world is antagonistic to God (2:15-16, 4: 5-6), will pass away (2:17) and does not know God (3:1). Yet Jesus is the propitiation for the whole world. Clearly there are differences in the meaning of 'world' here. Calvin saw the interpretation of this verse of some that extended salvation to all people (including Satan ?) as so foolish as to deserve no refutation. He sees John's design as simply meaning all people who would believe as well as those who were already believers scattered through the various nations, i.e., the whole church.

An alternative interpretation is that John has in mind the structural entirety of the world (i.e. the harmonic whole we saw in Jn. 3:16), i.e., the universe rediscovers its old order through Christ's propitiation. (7)

Jesus' propitiation extends as widely as sin. Not one elect person will be missed, but Jesus' sacrifice extends to all believers everywhere.

CONCLUSION

It is important in looking at these scriptures that we examine all the relevant Biblical statements and that we have in mind the analogy of the faith. Commentators on individual passages are focused upon the specific text before them and, though they may refer to other scriptures, their intention is to expound what is before them and some miss a balanced Biblical view. Many of the brief modern commentaries fall into this trap. Other commentators have a doctrinal axe to grind on this subject and endorse an Arminian interpretation, despite their excellence elsewhere (e.g., Lenski.) (8)

If God desires that all should be saved then he has manifestly failed in that desire. If God desires that all should be saved then Jesus died to apply that sacrifice to all. Again God has failed to effect his desire and Jesus' blood has been wasted. How? Because men reject the Gospel. There is no other reason. This makes man stronger than God in being able to resist him and means that God has failed to effect his will and Jesus' sacrifice has been negated in many instances by the will of man.

This cannot be true. These scriptures then, must not be taken superficially but interpreted according to the context of the letter and intentions of the writer.

Bibliography: top next page.....

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To be concluded, (DV) in the next issue.

A PURITAN SPEAKS....

There are two rotten pillars on which the fabric of late (sic) Arminianism (an egg of the old Pelagianism, which we had well hoped had been long since chilled, but is sit upon and brooded by the wanton wits of our degenerate and apostate spirits) doth principally stand.

The one is, That *God loveth all alike*, Cain as well as Abel, Judas as the rest of the apostles.

The other is, That *God giveth* (nay is bound, "ex debito," so to do) *both Christ, the great gift of his eternal love, for all alike to work out their redemption, and "vires credendi," power to believe in Christ to all alike to whom he gives the gospel:* whereby that redemption may effectually be applied for their salvation, if they please to make right use of that which is so put into their power.

The former destroys the *free* and *special* grace of God, by making it *universal*; the latter gives cause to man of glorying in himself rather than in God,- God concurring no farther to the salvation of a believer than a reprobate. Christ died for both alike;- God giving power of accepting Christ to both alike, men themselves determining the whole matter by their free-will; Christ making both savable, themselves make them to be saved.

This cursed doctrine of theirs crosseth the main drift of the holy Scripture; which is to abase and pull down the pride of man, to make him even to despair of himself, and to advance and set up the glory of God's free grace from the beginning to the end of a man's salvation. His hand hath laid the foundation of his spiritual house; his hand shall also finish it.

Stanley Gower

Member of the Westminster Assembly

Extract: *Letter of Attestation for John Owen's treatise: "The Death of Death"*