

Does God love me conditionally?

If I obey God, will He love me more?

Or if I disobey Him, will He love me less?

If I purposely ignore His commandments, will He cast me away?

Is God's love for me conditional on my actions?

METHOD

There are many questions we can ask that have no direct answer in scripture. To figure out answers to our questions, we need to establish precepts (i.e. principles) that can be applied to other scriptures, in order to interpret them correctly. The importance that we attribute to the most basic precepts influences our understanding of the subsequent precepts. So it is important to understand which precepts are the most basic and fundamental. Doing this well requires scriptural familiarity and a lot of practise. So, let's start practising.

In this study, we are going to examine some of the Biblical evidence that speaks to "Does God love me conditionally?" As you walk through these Biblical passages, we will ask you some questions to help focus your thoughts. You, however, will need to draw your own conclusions.

Definitions

The following passages appear to define love in relation to God and ourselves.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8).

"This is love, not that we have loved God but **that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins"** (1 John 4:10).

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if **while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son**, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8–10).

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of **the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"** (Galatians 2:20).

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... For I am sure that **neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Romans 8:38–39).

Questions

1. What does it mean when it says, “God is love”?
2. What is God’s key action? How does that inform us about love?
3. To whom are each of these passages speaking? Does the intended audience matter to how we understand them?
4. What does it mean by calling us an “enemy” while God was loving us?
5. What precepts can we learn from these passages?

Who does God love?

The following passages give us examples of the objects of God’s love.

“When **Israel** was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11:1).

“Husbands, love your wives, as **Christ loved the church** and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

“[Jesus] is the head of **the body, the church**” (Colossians 1:18).

“Now you are the **body of Christ** and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

“For God so loved **the world**, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“**He is the propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also **for the sins of the whole world**” (1 John 2:2).

Questions

1. List all the objects of God’s love in these passages above.
2. Are you on that list?

How God interacts with those He loves

This poem describes God's actions and emotions in dealing with Israel. Read this poem to learn the functioning of God's heart.

As you are reading, highlight the most significant actions God takes regarding Israel. Then in a different colour, highlight the motivations God has for taking these actions.

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
The more they were called,
the more they went away;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals
and burning offerings to idols.
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;
I took them up by their arms,
but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of kindness,
with the bands of love,
and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws,
and I bent down to them and fed them.
They shall not return to the land of Egypt,
but Assyria shall be their king,
because they have refused to return to me.
The sword shall rage against their cities,
consume the bars of their gates,
and devour them because of their own counsels.
My people are bent on turning away from me,
and though they call out to the Most High,
he shall not raise them up at all.
How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my burning anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not a man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.
They shall go after the Lord;
he will roar like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west;
they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria,
and I will return them to their homes, declares the Lord.
Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,

and the house of Israel with deceit,
but Judah still walks with God
and is faithful to the Holy One.
Ephraim feeds on the wind
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a covenant with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

The Lord has an indictment against Judah
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;
he will repay him according to his deeds.
In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
and in his manhood he strove with God.
He strove with the angel and prevailed;
he wept and sought his favor.
He met God at Bethel,
and there God spoke with us—
the Lord, the God of hosts,
the Lord is his memorial name:
“So you, by the help of your God, return,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.”
A merchant, in whose hands are false balances,
he loves to oppress.
Ephraim has said, “Ah, but I am rich;
I have found wealth for myself;
in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin.”
I am the Lord your God
from the land of Egypt;
I will again make you dwell in tents,
as in the days of the appointed feast.
I spoke to the prophets;
it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets gave parables.
If there is iniquity in Gilead,
they shall surely come to nothing:
in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls;
their altars also are like stone heaps
on the furrows of the field.
Jacob fled to the land of Aram;
there Israel served for a wife,
and for a wife he guarded sheep.
By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt,
and by a prophet he was guarded.
Ephraim has given bitter provocation;
so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him
and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling;

he was exalted in Israel,
but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.
And now they sin more and more,
and make for themselves metal images,
idols skillfully made of their silver,
all of them the work of craftsmen.
It is said of them,
“Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!”
Therefore they shall be like the morning mist
or like the dew that goes early away,
like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor
or like smoke from a window.
But I am the Lord your God
from the land of Egypt;
you know no God but me,
and besides me there is no savior.
It was I who knew you in the wilderness,
in the land of drought;
but when they had grazed, they became full,
they were filled, and their heart was lifted up;
therefore they forgot me.
So I am to them like a lion;
like a leopard I will lurk beside the way.
I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs;
I will tear open their breast,
and there I will devour them like a lion,
as a wild beast would rip them open.
He destroys you, O Israel,
for you are against me, against your helper.
Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities?
Where are all your rulers—
those of whom you said,
“Give me a king and princes”?
I gave you a king in my anger,
and I took him away in my wrath.
The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up;
his sin is kept in store.
The pangs of childbirth come for him,
but he is an unwise son,
for at the right time he does not present himself
at the opening of the womb.
Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?
O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.
Though he may flourish among his brothers,
the east wind, the wind of the Lord, shall come,
rising from the wilderness,
and his fountain shall dry up;

his spring shall be parched;
it shall strip his treasury
of every precious thing.
Samaria shall bear her guilt,
because she has rebelled against her God;
they shall fall by the sword;
their little ones shall be dashed in pieces,
and their pregnant women ripped open.

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
Take with you words
and return to the Lord;
say to him,
“Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.
Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;
and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.”

I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.
will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;
his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.
They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.
O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.
Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the Lord are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them
(Hosea 11-14).

Now read the context surrounding 1 John 4:8.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:7–20).

Questions

1. God likens Himself to a parent. How do the actions and motivations of a parent inform you about God’s actions and motivations?
2. How do the actions and motivations of God you listed from Hosea co-exist with the God whose very being defines love?
3. Based on the passage in 1 John 4, how do you come to truly know God’s love?
4. How does truly knowing God’s love transform you? How will you then regard God?

Love and keeping Jesus’ commandments

Given what you have so far concluded, what do you make of this passage?

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered 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. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me’” (1 John 14:21–24).

Conclusion

This study is purposely written to help stimulate your thought, not to lead you to a pre-determined answer. We have presented a range of principles surrounding the nature of God and the definition of love. We have examined some examples of God's interaction with people He loves.

We hope that you will be sensitised to these principles as you continue to read scripture. You may be surprised when and where this leads to a greater insight.

One final thought: When studying scripture, the best studies come from the best questions. In doing this study, have you found any better questions than those we started with?

MORE READING

The sermon "Am I Good Enough for God" explores ideas but different from those we have explored in this study. Check it out at www.melbsdb.com.au/messages/ .

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