

Editorial: More Loving Than God? (2)

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Limits of Christian Love and Cautions

In the last editorial, we examined the blasphemous argument made by both Arminians and hypo-Calvinists that they are more loving than the God who wills and desires to save some but not others. Besides noting that a broader, narrower or different scope is not a valid measure of love, we concluded that man's moral obligation to love is, in fact, necessarily and properly restricted in various ways. Now I intend to demonstrate this with various examples and later I will explain Scripture's own criteria for measuring love. Considering the limited scope of man's love, we turn the argument on its head by asking why the Arminian or hypo-Calvinist should demand that God loves every single person who ever lived, when He demands that men must not have such a universal and promiscuous love.

In taking this approach, we are acknowledging the important relation between ethics and theology, especially the relation between Reformed ethics and Reformed theology. Reformed doctrine is not merely distinctive on account of its theology (such as God's eternal election and reprobation or His everlasting covenant). In fact, if it has a distinctive theology, then it must necessarily also have distinctive ethics because right ethics flow from right theology. Many of the objections against Reformed theology are built upon this implication. Arminians argue that Reformed theology must be wrong because it will lead to bad ethics (or what they presume are bad ethics). For example, they claim that teaching that God will preserve His elect from falling will make people careless. Some draw this conclusion because they do not understand (or ignore) what Reformed theology teaches about God's use of necessary means in causing His saints to persevere. In this case, Reformed theology gives us the right reasons for good ethics, for it teaches the power and goal of God in sanctification, along with all manner of good and high motivations which He employs as means. These are much better ethics than those implied by Arminianism. Arminianism denies the power of God in sanctification, and lacks many of the strong motivations and encouragements provided by Reformed theology.

In this case, I am making the argument that Arminian ethics (which their argument simply assumes without any proof or explanation) are not the ethics of Scripture at all and not the ethics which consistent Reformed theology would require. There is a warning here for ourselves and an admonition for the hypo-Calvinists who have already uncritically swallowed the ethics of the Arminian. If good ethics must be derived from good theology, bad ethics can and do corrupt good theology. Universalism in ethics, over time and quite naturally, will produce universalist theology. The invention and use of Jesse Morell's argument illustrates this. Churches which are hypo-Calvinist today did not become hypo-Calvinist overnight or for no reason. There may be many reasons, but I expect that a significant reason for many is that they allowed the ethics of the Arminians, universalists and the whole wicked world to infect their own ethics and, therefore, also their theology. Losing one's orthodox theology because of bad practices is a judgment of God which has been repeated often in church history (Rev. 2:5; 3:3). We must be on guard against this danger in our own lives, in our families and in our churches.

My method is to show examples of thoughts, words or deeds from God's people which were approved by God in both the Old and the New Testaments, and which demonstrate hatred rather than love towards other humans. First of all, despite differences in the external administration of the covenant, such that there was an earthly temple and an earthly nation with civil laws and physical wars, the moral law remains the same because God does not change. Furthermore, the Old Testament was given specifically to provide examples for our learning and admonition (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11). We will see fewer examples in the New Testament since it is geared more towards didactic teaching, even in the Gospels (which we will review further). The sparsity of New Testament examples generally makes these examples especially significant and even more so because the Lord Jesus Christ gave us His paramount example to follow in all things (John 13:15). We also see fewer examples in the New Testament because this period is characterized by the gospel being preached to the nations, and Christ's gathering and saving a catholic church, so that this period is an especially rich time of God's grace and mercy before the final judgment (Luke 4:19; 9:54-56; 19:10; John 3:17; Acts 17:30; II Cor. 6:2).

Because of our natural inclination to hate God and our neighbour, a word of caution is appropriate before we begin. None of these examples ought to be

misinterpreted as an excuse to entertain or even consider personal vendettas or vindictiveness, to harbour or nurture personal grudges, or to seek personal revenge by violent or any other means (Matt. 5:44). That error belonged to the leaven of the Pharisees. In every one of these cases, this sanctified hatred is necessary for the sake of the Lord. From the beginning, God put enmity between the devil and the woman, Eve, and between the children of the devil and her spiritual children (Gen. 3:15). Any enmity which does not fall into that category is evil from the outset, as evil in principle as Cain murdering his righteous brother Abel (I John 3:10-15). Furthermore, though the children of the devil may be numerous and deceitful, insofar as is reasonably possible, our interactions are to be marked first of all by seeking peace, forbearing and applying the judgment of charity (Ps. 120:6-7; Rom. 12:18; I Cor. 13:7).

Finally, even in extreme cases, we must still restrain ourselves, refusing to take vengeance for ourselves but crying out to God to bring judgment quickly against His adversaries who are our oppressors for His sake (Luke 18:1-8). In such cases, we choose rather to flee persecution and heap coals on their heads by our goodness, not rendering evil for evil, and so overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21; I Pet. 3:8-17). In suffering evil unjustly (while choosing, as Jesus did, first to flee or avoid evil when we can; cf. Matt. 10:23; John 7:1), we follow the example of Christ and glorify Him by our witness. Having this foundation, we can proceed with care, considering that Cain's murderous wickedness was far worse in the sight of God than Jehoshaphat's sin in helping Ahab (II Chron. 19:2). In so doing, we may hope with God's blessing to avoid the errors of turning to the left or to the right (Deut. 5:32).

Holy War, Judicial Hatred and Imprecations

In reviewing the Old Testament, we need to anticipate some objections coming from the universalist viewpoint. The first is crude Marcionism, which we immediately reject as a denial of the doctrine of Scripture, and of the immutability and righteousness of God. Second, no one denies that the death penalty was required (even from Noah's day in cases of murder, unlike in the days of Cain when the earth became filled with violence; Gen. 9:5-6) and that Israel was commanded to kill her enemies in various wars. Some will argue that there should be no death penalty today and that there are no justifiable

wars, claiming that these things belonged exclusively to the time of types and shadows. Indeed, many universalists are also strict pacifists.

Certainly, the death penalty for particular crimes belonged to the Mosaic civil law, and many of the Old Testament wars were intended in part to illustrate types and shadows for our learning. However, that the death penalty was already given in Noah's time with the reasons for it and the commendation of it also in the New Testament indicates that it should still be part of the criminal justice system today (Rom. 13:4). The civil power is described as a minister of God bearing the sword to avenge by executing wrath on evil-doers. The sword was a Roman instrument of capital punishment.

Similarly, the Roman soldiers asking how to show the fruit of repentance were not told by John the Baptist that they had to become strict pacifists. Rather they were told not to threaten or to accuse anyone falsely and to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14). Indeed, a centurion during Christ's ministry was commended as having greater faith than any in Israel (Matt. 8:10), and another devout centurion was first among the Gentiles to be brought the gospel by Peter (Acts 10:1-6). These godly men were soldiers who were expected to go to war for the Roman Empire.

However, even if this were not the case, it would still remain that, at least in the Old Testament, to execute the death penalty upon a criminal was not an act of love towards him, as the universalists would understand love. By executing the criminal, he no longer has any space to repent but goes to the judgment in the hands of the righteous God (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 2:21). For the same reason, to kill a heathen in an Old Testament war was not an act of love for the enemy combatant. Having that clear at the outset, we will understand the significance of so many examples. We do not dispute, of course, that the executioner or the soldier in such cases may be performing an act of love towards God and his neighbour, who is delivered from the danger of the murderer or heathen enemy soldier. This does not at all detract from the fact that the act shows no love for the murderer or enemy soldier, but rather hatred, just as if one had said, "May you now die in your impenitence and blood-guiltiness, and fall into the hands of the just God who executes His wrath upon the wicked."

There is one other frivolous objection which may be brought. One might claim many of these examples, such as the conquest of Canaan, should be

disqualified because God in these instances specifically told them to do these deeds and the particular case cannot prove the general. But this admission actually proves our claim that God does not command a universal unqualified unlimited love. If He had, then these particular cases would put God at odds with Himself and deny the immutable universal applicability of His moral standard. Just one example is enough to prove our contention that the assumed premise of the “more loving than God” argument is false but these examples will prove much more.

One of the clearest early examples is the call of Moses and his subsequent obedience. Moses is told explicitly that, by confronting Pharaoh and through God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, He will smite Egypt with wonders (Ex. 3:19-20; 4:21-23). Though Moses knows it will lead to the devastation of Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh, he does not object to the Lord that his words and actions as a prophet would not be loving to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. It is not only God that destroys the Egyptians. In obedience to God, Moses stretches out his hand so that the waters of the Red Sea return (Ex. 14:26-28). It is further remarkable that Israel with Moses then sings a godly song of triumph, rejoicing and dancing at the destruction of the Egyptians by God (Ex. 15:1-21). Where is any love or even sorrow for Pharaoh and the Egyptians here? There was no place for it in the face of the revelation of God’s judgment on them.

There are many examples in the wilderness wanderings. Joshua’s battle against Amalek is striking. While Joshua led the Israelites in battle, Moses had to keep his arms raised until the Amalekites were defeated (Ex. 17:8-16). There was no room to love those whom God had determined to destroy utterly. This was not only true of some outside the nation of Israel. When Moses returned from Mount Sinai to destroy the golden calf, he called those who were on the Lord’s side to slay even brother, companion or neighbour of the idolaters (Ex. 32:26-29). The sons of Levi were called not to love the three thousand whom they slew.

The congregation was told to separate themselves from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in their rebellion, so that God could destroy them all (Num. 16:24-34). They were not to have mercy or compassion on them by clinging to them. When Balaam’s counsel led the people into whoredom and

idolatry with the daughters of Moab and Midian, Phinehas turned away God's wrath by running Zimri and Cozbi through with a javelin (Num. 25:1-15). His swift and decisive action was not with any love for Zimri or Cozbi, but with the intent to destroy them and purge the evil out of Israel, and so deliver the people from the plague. Phinehas's zeal in this execution of judgment was highly commended as righteousness unto all generations (Ps. 106:28-31). He would not have been commended for suggesting that they all simply ought to love Zimri and Cozbi, and spare them. Later Moses was instructed by God to take vengeance on the Midianites and destroy them (Num. 31:1-2). Rather than commend their mercy and love in taking all the women and children as captives, Moses was righteously angry with them (Num. 31:9-17).

We move on to examples in the law in which the Israelites were told specifically to show no pity or mercy or compassion to certain people. Regarding the Canaanites, false prophets, murderers and false witnesses, the refrain is repeated: "thine eye shall not pity" (Deut. 7:16; 13:8-9; 19:13, 21). Christ's commentary on the last verse cited above is not to overthrow it, but rather that the Christian should patiently and humbly bear his punishment (Matt. 5:38-40). Such civil punishments are still far less than what our sins deserve. In any case, these judicial punishments explicitly forbid the kind of unlimited pity and love that is assumed by universalists to be fundamental morality.

Deuteronomy provides us with at least two other notable examples. First, the tribes on Mount Ebal were expected to pronounce curses upon all those who violated the law of God and all the people were to concur (Deut. 27:13-26). Many today reckon that pronouncing a curse upon anyone in any circumstance is sinful (e.g., by wrongly presuming that all men are in the image of God, cf. James 3:9). Certainly a curse is not love but the opposite. But God required His people to pronounce these curses (and we will later see more examples of godly curses). Second, God's people are called to rejoice in His vengeance, even in the avenging of their own blood (Deut. 32:35-43). They are not called here to love God's adversaries, those who are rewarded with vengeance for their hatred of Him.

Time and space would fail us to go through every example of holy hatred in the conquest of Canaan, but we would be remiss not to note especially the execution of the kings. Many of these thirty-one kings, if not all, were first

saved alive and then executed in captivity. Having been killed, their bodies were hung on a tree until evening, as Joshua did to the king of Jericho (Josh. 8:29; 10:26-27). Moses explains for us that this signified that these kings (as representatives of their nations or cities) were accursed of God (Deut. 21:23). This hanging was not love or mercy but the proclamation of a curse.

We move on to the time of the Judges and another example of godly cursing. Deborah and Barak sang of the command from the angel of the Lord that the people of God must curse vehemently the inhabitants of Meroz, because they refused to fight for God's cause against Sisera (Judg. 5:23). This is not an instance of God cursing but not His people. This passage is notable because of the specific command to curse from Jesus Christ (the angel of the Lord and captain of the host of Jehovah, cf. Josh. 5:14). In fact, it is a direct and emphatic imperative, repeated in a double-barrelled form for a total of three times. There is no suggestion in the text that this was merely some kind of warning or rebuke with a desire for repentance. A curse is not a rebuke or admonition but a pronouncement of (or request for) God's retributive, not corrective, punishment and wrath. It is contrasted with the pronouncement of God's blessing upon Jael. Jael must be blessed and, therefore, the inhabitants of Meroz must be cursed, and in such a way that the people of God participate in this cursing. The logic here is simple: God's people must agree with God.

We will mention just a few more examples that happen to occur to me as particularly poignant and memorable. When Samson (praised as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11) is given renewed strength, it is so that he may destroy the Philistines, not in love for them, but in love for God and His people, and in judgment against the Philistines for being idolaters, oppressors and enemies of God (Judg. 16:28). When children of Belial in Benjamin commit atrocities, the Israelites rightly demand for them to be delivered up to be put to death (Judg. 20:13). The Israelites did not love these vile men but, out of love for God and His people, their calling was to hate them, to destroy them and put the evil away from Israel. In the pursuit of this righteous cause, almost an entire tribe was wiped out because, in misguided loyalty and stubbornness, the Benjamites refused to hate the wicked enemies of God.

Another example of great grief and failure caused by the refusal to exercise holy hatred was King Saul who brought trouble on Israel, David's house and

his own progeny, from whom the kingship was taken. He was told in no uncertain terms to destroy the Amalekites utterly, again because they were avowed and bitter enemies of God's people, and God had sworn to destroy them (Ex. 17:14-16). People in our day have forgotten that our God's name and revelation is *Jehovah-nissi*, the sovereign, faithful, unchanging, covenant-keeping God, whose war banner is raised perpetually against His enemies from generation to generation until their remembrance is utterly wiped out. Jehovah does not tire or grow weary of waging His war, as if His holy hatred could mellow and soften into mercy and forgiveness. If His anger is but for a moment, it is because the object of His anger is not His hated enemy but His beloved children (Ps. 30:5; 103:8-18; Isa. 54:7-10). How different was Saul! He saw an opportunity for gain and despised the love, service and devotion he owed to his Creator, whom King Agag hated. King Agag, in his turn, made an appeal to Samuel's natural compassion for his common humanity, as if the prophet would ignore the command of God for the sake of such an hypocritical appeal. Many today would prefer to listen to Agag and judge Samuel as unloving, harsh and cruel, but Samuel understood the place of holy hatred for God's enemies, though he sorrowed for Saul (I Sam. 15:32-16:1).

We know that ordinarily prophets in Scripture were especially holy men, as was the case with Samuel and Elijah. Yet both of these did not refrain from executing God's judgments according to their callings, putting God's enemies to the sword (either by their own hands or by direct orders). It was not because Elijah loved the prophets of Baal that, after mocking them, he slew them in hundreds by the brook Kishon (I Kings 18:40). Similarly, it was only when the angel of the Lord instructed him otherwise (after the captain begged mercy rather than to order the prophet) that Elijah ceased to call down fire from heaven to destroy king Ahaziah's captains with their fifties (II Kings 1:9-16). He understood that these messengers of Baal-worshipping Ahaziah were enemies of God. Unlike Samuel and Elijah, Jehoshaphat forgot his allegiance to the Lord and had to be rebuked by Hanani, as we noted previously (II Chron. 19:2-3).

Nehemiah shines very brightly in Scripture as a holy man dedicated to God and the welfare of His people in a dark time of weakness, oppression and small things. Yet Nehemiah repeatedly pronounces unambiguous imprecations against Sanballat and his cohorts, even praying that their sins should never

be blotted out. That is, his godly and specific prayer, not even informed by any specific prophecy or instruction of God, is that He should not forgive or justify these men, but that they should stand exposed to His eternal wrath and indignation for their sin of angering Him by opposing the builders (Neh. 4:4-5). There are such apostate men still today who set themselves up against those who labour in building the walls of the city of God, against whom such prayers are appropriate (I John 2:18-19; cf. Gal. 1:8-9; 5:12).

Such imprecations, utterly contrary to the misguided ideas of unlimited universal love, are not rare in Scripture and even our beloved book of Psalms is full of them. A simple internet search listed 14 “major” imprecatory psalms (Ps. 5; 10; 17; 35; 58; 59; 69; 70; 79; 83; 109; 129; 137; 140), which is almost 10%! This means that on any given Lord’s day, in a psalm-singing church with two services and four psalms in each service, all else being equal, the probability of singing at least one imprecatory psalm is at least 75%! This is why churches without a theology in harmony with the imprecatory psalms are typically not psalm-singing churches! Many psalms with imprecations also refer to Christ in His earthly ministry or are otherwise alluded to in the New Testament (Ps. 31; 35; 40; 41; 55; 68; 69; 109). Even more psalms express sanctified hatred in some form or another (we noted Psalm 139:21-22 previously).

I will highlight just two further striking examples of a holy attitude at odds with universal love put into mouths of all who obey the enduring and apostolic commandment to sing psalms (Ps. 95:2; 105:2; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13). In one instance, the righteous see the destruction of the wicked (who oppressed them, as Doeg the Edomite did), and “fear” and “laugh” at him, even mocking as in agreement with the Lord’s laughing and mocking recorded elsewhere (Ps. 52:6-7; cf. Ps. 2:4). Though done out of a reverent God-fearing heart, the psalmist (with the psalm-singing congregation of God) is so devoid of love for this wicked enemy of God that he mocks and laughs at the absurdity of the wicked’s boastful arrogance against God in face of His destruction of the wicked. Besides glorifying God in the righteousness of His judgments, such mocking edifies us also in this respect, namely, that in the fear of God we might better avoid falling into the same foolish pride and wickedness.

The other attitude regarding the destruction of the wicked exemplified for us in the psalms is rejoicing in the God who executes judgment which is glori-

ously righteous and which also delivers us from the oppression of the wicked (Ps. 58:10-11). Though we may and ought to sorrow (in measure), especially for those closest to us, even family, familiar friends and acquaintances with others who share our common humanity, flesh and blood from Adam (as all together the offspring of God in this sense), we may not allow our earthly ties to interfere with our allegiance to God and even our rejoicing in His just judgments (II Sam. 1:17-27; 18:33-19:7; Acts 17:26-28; Rom. 9:1-3; II Cor. 6:10).

Vengeance on Enemies of the Gospel

Unavoidably, in our review of Old Testament illustrations, we have touched upon the New Testament but it is astonishing how hastily with regards to this subject some appeal to Marcion or at least some form of dispensationalism. In the interests of closing the door on this particular line of objection, we will continue. When Christ sent out the disciples to preach throughout Judea and Galilee, He taught them to carry out a very specific practice which is contrary to the modern doctrine of unlimited universal love. Whenever they were rejected in a certain place and the people showed themselves impenitent, the disciples were to shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against them (Matt. 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5).

This was not an act of love, but essentially a promise that they would receive greater judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15). For the recipients of this sign, it would have been better for them never to have heard the gospel at all. This imprecatory practice was followed also by the missionaries in the book of Acts and it always, in some sense, attends the preaching of the gospel (Acts 13:51; 18:6; II Cor. 2:16). In case we should think that Christ suffered from this universal unlimited love delusion, He Himself reiterated these curses (Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:10-15). Christ's practice of cursing (which some today imagine to be unfitting for His followers) includes His curses against the hypocritical and impenitent Pharisees, even to their faces for their oppression of God's people (Matt. 11:21; 23:13-35).

I find it striking that Paul's first recorded miracle as an apostle (who was himself blinded on the Damascus road until Ananias restored his sight) was to strike Elymas the sorcerer with blindness (Acts 13:8-11). Paul denounces him

as a “child of the devil” (ordinarily a term reserved for the reprobate wicked) and an enemy of all righteousness. The miracle was performed not out of love for Elymas or to bring Elymas to repentance, but to rebuke and expose him while confirming Paul’s ministry. Paul’s ministry included many such words and deeds against the enemies of the gospel, not in love for them, but in love for God and His people (e.g., Gal. 1:8-9; 5:12; II Tim. 4:14). Following the example and precedent of the Old Testament, the people of God in the New Testament are also expected to pronounce curses upon God’s enemies (I Cor. 16:22; Jude 11).

Although the primary purpose of church discipline is to gain the repentance of the subject, similar to the preaching, it is carried out with the understanding that in many cases this will not be achieved. In such cases, it is a manifestation of the church’s hatred for God’s enemies in removing the wicked from their company and having no fellowship with them so that, when carried out properly and faithfully, the church’s rejection of them is a testimony of God’s rejection of them (I Cor. 5:11; Eph. 5:11; Titus 3:10; II John 10-11; cf. John 20:23).

The clear New Testament teaching concerning apostasy and the unforgivable sin also has implications for not practicing an indiscriminate love that knows no bounds (Mark 3:28-29; Heb. 6:4-9; 10:28-31). John, the “apostle of love,” makes it explicit that we are not to pray for the repentance of those who have committed the sin “unto death” (I John 5:16). Certainly we may not be too quick to judge who has apostatized in committing such a sin, but John nevertheless mentions this a real and practical concern in the context of having called his readers’ attention to the evident “antichrists” who had departed from among them by denying that Jesus is the Christ, either by their grossly heretical doctrines or scandalous lives of blatant hypocrisy. It would surely be an error in the other extreme to conclude that we may never judge a person to have committed this sin, considering our calling to judge (I Cor. 6:2-3). After describing the reprobate at length concerning their sins, hypocrisy and predestination, Jude presents what I understand to be a sharp contrast. Unlike those who have gone the way of Cain, Balaam and Korah, there are others for whom we must have compassion or who must be saved “with fear” (Jude 22-23). The implication is that we do not have the calling to be compassionate or to try to save those regarding whom Jude has given such strong warning.

In fact, there are examples in the New Testament which in their context at least strongly suggest that this judgment has been made, even by name (I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 2:17). That the Thessalonians are specifically told not to count one who disobeys Paul's epistle as an enemy (but to admonish them as a brother) implies that there are other cases in which such an attitude would be appropriate or even the norm for such rejection of clear apostolic instruction (II Thess. 3:15). To treat in love as brothers or friends those who have so highly offended God that there is no possibility of their repentance and forgiveness is certainly at odds with a profession of love for God.

Some quote Ephesians 6:12 as if this suggests that the devil does not also have flesh-and-blood servants and children (like Judas Iscariot or Elymas), but that the enemies of the church are only unclean spirits. Since this conclusion would be an absurd contradiction, the text speaks of the ultimate spiritual roots of our enemies. We do not strive against flesh and blood with carnal weapons (as in the pictures and shadows of the Old Testament times), but we look beyond the flesh and blood of our adversaries to the demonic origin of their wickedness, and ultimately take up the battle with spiritual weapons and spiritual armour, by the Word of God, by faith and by prayer (cf. Isa. 54:16-17; Matt. 10:28; II Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:13-18).

Finally, the book of Revelation presents the church suffering under persecution with an attitude contrary to the one being promoted as Christian love today. The church, even the souls of perfected saints in heaven, longs for the day of Christ's vengeance (Rev. 6:10). Specifically, although there is no personal vindictiveness implied, they long for their own blood to be avenged. The prayers of God's suffering and oppressed people ascend with incense, and fire from God's altar is cast upon the earth in a manifestation of God's judgment and wrath (Rev. 8:3-5). These prayers are the spiritual weapons of God's elect who cry to him night and day for His justice to be executed in the earth (Luke 18:1-8). When this judgment finally comes in all its fullness and terrible glory to destroy the ungodly world system and whore of Babylon, the antichristian kingdom of the beast, along with his unholy prophet and the dragon behind it all (Satan), the church overflows in triumphant rejoicing and worship (Rev. 18:20; 19:1-6). This promise of God avenging His people upon the wicked is the comfort of His suffering people who mourn and pray in this present evil age (Isa. 61:2).

Consequences of Universalism

God's people are deprived of that comfort when the sickly sweet doctrine of an unlimited universal love is taught as if it were a divine commandment. When this false doctrine works itself out in a church, there are both harmful theological and practical consequences. Once it is claimed that we must love every single person who ever lived without exception and without limit, naturally it is claimed that God's love is also so promiscuous. Then either God's love fails or it is not eternal or it is not holy and righteous. Clear biblical doctrines concerning God's sovereignty, election and reprobation, apostasy and the unforgivable sin are carefully swept under the carpet. God's judgments, both temporal and eternal, are ignored. The devil and man's free will are raised up as having some kind of power beyond God's control to try to excuse Him (essentially, this is dualism or polytheism), despite the clear teaching of Scripture (Mark 1:27; Prov. 21:1). Hell is rarely spoken about and often denied completely. Because Scripture cannot be understood in this system, Bible reading declines or is replaced by reading disconnected thoughts from carefully selected verses designed to soothe the emotions and conscience of the reader.

Repentance is no longer so important, since God's love and the Christian's love must be the same for the impenitent. Forgiveness is required without the necessity of repentance and fellowship is required without the necessity of holiness. The judgment of charity tempered with vigilant wisdom is replaced by wilfully blind naivety and folly (Matt. 10:16). Strict pacifism, denying even self-defence, is demanded. These practical errors expose people to all manner of dangers from predators of all sorts who thrive in such environments. Civilization itself sows the seeds of its own destruction, when such a philosophy works itself out in the culture and society. In the church, Christian discipline is jettisoned and excommunication is never to be spoken of again. The Lord's Supper and baptism must be open to all without asking too many questions. The preaching must not make anyone feel uncomfortable or under condemnation. The ultimate sin becomes judging another or excluding them in any way. This is the humanism of the godless world, not Christianity. Those who follow the trajectory of this false doctrine create for themselves an idol, just as much as if they had chopped down tree, carved a piece of wood and overlaid it with gold. Their idol is in their own image: the image of man, the way they want God to be. This is the very opposite to Scripture's presentation: God made

man in His image, not the other way around. First, we must know God and His love, then we will understand His calling for us with respect to our love.

Related to Jesse Morell's ridiculous argument that he is more loving than the sovereign God who loved Jacob and hated Esau (Rom. 9:13), is the superficially more persuasive claim that Christ is somehow more loving than the God who does not desire the salvation of the reprobate:

[S]ome have suggested that Christ here [in Matthew 23:37 and Luke 19:41-42] expresses human feelings and desires and as such we learn nothing of the nature of God. First we acknowledge that if it were any other human this argument might carry some weight. But we are talking about Humanity in its perfect state. Are we to believe that "holy humanity is more generous and tender than God"?¹

The proponents of the well-meant offer would have us believe that such arguments trump everything else we have considered in Scripture. While it is true that Christ's love is expressed also through His necessarily limited human nature and that He has a human will in distinction to the divine will (contrary to the monothelite heresy), it is not true that His love is ever at odds with the love of God. In the passages cited, Christ's love is expressed for His elect and beloved people only. In fact, in the context of Matthew 23, Christ is opposing the Pharisees with cursing. When He says, "how often would I have gathered thy children ... and ye would not," He is not expressing love for those who futilely and wickedly opposed His will to gather the church, but explaining why the people of Jerusalem will be cut off in their generations (Matt. 23:38). His attitude toward them is not one of love, but of righteous anger and condemnation, entirely in agreement with the judgments of God against them.

When, in Luke 19, Christ weeps over the city (not actually the same occasion as in Matthew 23), His grief is for the great wickedness of those who have brought this terrible ruin upon Jerusalem and for His elect sheep in the midst of Jerusalem (cf. Gen. 6:5-6). There is much more complexity here with regard

¹ K. W. Stebbins, *Christ Freely Offered* (Australia: Covenanter Press, 1999), p. 46; citing R. L. Dabney, "God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy, as Related to His Power, Wisdom and Sincerity," *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol. 1 (London: Banner, 1967), p. 308.

to the significance of Jerusalem as an Old Testament type and the organic nature of the church, but this answer will suffice. Even Judas Iscariot was not properly an object of Christ's love. He was certainly treated as a companion for a time, privileged with the other disciples, but from the beginning Christ knew who would betray Him (John 6:64-71). Christ knows His sheep with the knowledge of love (John 10:14). To the others, including Judas Iscariot, He will say on the last day, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23).

We have seen that God's love must have a different scope to ours but, to speak as a fool, does this different scope somehow make our love better or morally superior to God's? First of all, it is not really true that the scope of human love can ever be broader than God's. We do not even know every person who lives in the present, let alone every person who has ever lived or who will live. If we do not really know them, we cannot legitimately claim to love them. At most, we could only boast hypothetically that, if we knew them, we would endeavour to love them. Whether we actually would love them is another question considering our capacity to love is very small, even as regenerated Christians. But God has known and loved all His people, more than the stars in the sky for multitude, through all ages and in eternity with an everlasting love. Even in this measure, our love cannot compare to God's. But, if scope is not a legitimate measure of love, how does Scripture itself measure love and how should God's love be measured, considering that it is one of His attributes (I John 4:16)? We will have to consider the proper measure of God's love and a biblical definition of love with the command to love next time (DV).