

A Silly Gospel

by David Servant

David Servant challenges the contemporary understanding of God's love by emphasizing the necessity of acknowledging His holiness, judgment, and the call to repentance.

Scripture: Matthew 5:45, John 8:44, John 16:8, Acts 24:25, Romans 2:4, Romans 11:22, Ephesians 2:1, Hebrews 12:29, James 2:13, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 3:10

Topics: "Gods Holiness", "Repentance And Judgment"

Description

David Servant addresses the misconception that God's father-heart extends to all, emphasizing that God is only the Father of those who have repented and believed in Jesus, while others remain spiritually children of Satan. He highlights the danger of idolizing the 'father-heart of God' and neglecting other aspects of God's character, such as His holiness and wrath. Servant challenges the trend of focusing solely on God's love for sinners, stressing the importance of preaching about holiness, judgment, and repentance, even if it is unpopular. He warns against accommodating sinners with a watered-down gospel, advocating for a message that convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment, as exemplified by Jesus, John the Baptist, and the apostles.

Transcript

1.) What about all that the New Testament teaches about the "father-heart of God"? Jesus called God "Father" over one-hundred times in the Gospel of John. How could our loving heavenly Father be said to hate anyone?

The answer is that God is not the Father of everyone. He is only Father of those who have repented and believed in Jesus. They, and only they, are born of His Spirit and have become His children (see 1 John 3:10). All others are spiritually children of Satan (see John 8:44, Eph. 2:1-2). Jesus referred to God as His Father, but certainly not as everyone's Father. So to say that God has a father-heart towards those who are not His children is nonsense.

We might also ask, "Because God has a father-heart, does that motivate Him to love Satan and demons?" Obviously not. Neither does God's father-heart motivate Him to love Satan's spiritual children. His love for them, as I've emphasized in my two previous articles, is a merciful love that is temporary, lasting only until they die.

I should also add that whenever a certain teaching about God is widely emphasized and becomes popular, even good teachings such as "the father-heart of God," we so easily forget or neglect aspects of God's character that Scripture emphasizes as much or even more. This has certainly been true regarding teaching about the father-heart of God. To emphasize that God loves His children is good, but to reduce God to nothing more than the equivalent of an earthly father does Him a great injustice. He is so much more. How many earthly fathers do you know who have no beginning or end, have created a universe, invented animals, reign over angels, possess infinite knowledge and power, never sin, will one day judge everyone, and are the sum of perfection?

Scripture says that God is love, but it also says that He is a consuming fire (see Heb. 12:29). Both are equally true. Paul wrote, "Behold the kindness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). To focus solely on one aspect of God's character while neglecting other aspects is a form of idolatry--the worship of a god of our own invention.

How many of us are at least a little bit guilty of this kind of idolatry? Take a look at your Bible. What verses have you underlined or highlighted? I'll bet they're all "good ones"! But God gave us the whole Bible. We would be better to underline every verse in the Bible, even those that plainly speak of God's hatred and abhorrence of sinners, as well as His wrath upon them. Every one of those verses is just as inspired as those we have underlined.

2.) When Jesus was on the earth, He didn't exemplify the kind of hatred for sinners that you have attributed to God.

Of course not. God's hatred of sinners is manifested primarily when His mercy for them ends. "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jas. 2:13), and temporary mercy temporarily triumphs over judgment.

While Jesus ministered on the earth, He related to the unrepentant in the same way that the Father is relating to them every day--with merciful love. "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). But Jesus continually warned everyone that God's mercy would one day end for the unrepentant, and then His wrath would fall. He couldn't have made it clearer that sin offends God. He spoke of sin and holiness all the time. He called people to repentance as the only way to escape sure judgment.

But wasn't Jesus called "a friend of sinners"?

He was, but I don't think we should base our understanding of Jesus on one sentence of criticism aimed at Him by self-righteous, religious hypocrites who had no concern for hell-bound sinners. They condemned Jesus only to justify themselves. They also called Jesus "Beelzebul," meaning "ruler of the demons" (see Matt. 10:45). Shall we build our understanding of Jesus on that remark by the same critical group?

Jesus indeed spent time with sinners, but He was certainly not their friend. The Bible that Jesus inspired says that anyone who is a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (see Jas. 4:4). Jesus was not an enemy of God, and neither was He a friend of the world. They hated Him and ultimately crucified Him. Jesus Himself declared that the world hated Him because He testified that its deeds were evil (see John 7:7). That is, He preached repentance. They didn't like His message of repentance and holiness. So let us not imagine Jesus hanging around with unrepentant people, laughing at their dirty jokes and joining in their gossip. Unrepentant sinners were extremely uncomfortable around Jesus.

Did Jesus preach a message of God's universal love as we continually hear today? We would do well to ask the scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus continually condemned, that question. Or, ask the money-changers in the temple, whom Jesus drove out with a whip, or the Syrophenecan woman, whom Jesus initially ignored and called a dog. These all heard Jesus when His mercy was wearing a little thin. They could all give us a good sermon about Jesus' true character that would be more scriptural than what can be heard in churches where preachers make rebels feel all warm and fuzzy about God's love.

To understand the full character of Jesus, we must read His warnings of the future judgment, when He speaks of the Son of Man coming "in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). The Jesus of the book of Revelation--who pours out His wrath and kills millions of people--is the same Jesus of the Gospels. The only difference is time. Over time, His mercy runs out. When it does, we read that sinners cower in terror at the wrath of the Lamb (see Rev. 6:6), the not-so-gentle Lamb. Is this the Jesus whom you believe in and serve? If not, you don't believe in and serve the Jesus of the Bible.

Additionally, to understand the full character of Jesus, we need to read the entire Old Testament as well, as it covers a greater period of time where we can observe God's mercy ending on numerous occasions. Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father" and, "I and the Father are One" (John 14:9, 10:30). Thus, when we read about God's judgments in the Old Testament--when God kills people by the tens and hundreds of thousands--we're reading about the judgments of Jesus. He wasn't watching from the sidelines and whispering to angels, "Wow, Dad needs some anger management...He's really losing His cool today!" Jesus was just as righteously enraged at those times as His Father. His mercy had also ended.

3.) Preaching about God's love for sinners is more effective than preaching about holiness, judgment and repentance. People don't want to hear about those things. But if we preach about God's love for sinners, sinners respond. The Bible says that "it is the kindness of God that leads men to repentance."

This reveals the basic problem. It doesn't seem to matter if our message is the same as Jesus', John the Baptist's or the apostles'. Success in Christianity today is most often measured by how many come to church. Using the same marketing principles as Wal-Mart, churches cater to the customers with the hopes of gaining more. If more customers will come to church by means of telling them a message that is agreeable to them, then let's tell them what they want to hear. "That's using wisdom," church-growth specialists tell us. But that is not how to make disciples who love Jesus more than their own lives (as He required; see Luke 14:26). And true wisdom, by the way, begins with the fear of the Lord (see Prov. 9:10).

Currently, the U.S. armed forces are having a hard time finding enough recruits. What if they adopted a seeker-sensitive policy? What if they promised potential recruits that if they joined, there was nothing expected of them? Soldiers could get up in the morning whenever they wanted. They could practice training drills if they wanted to, but they had the option to watch TV instead. If war broke out, they could choose if they wanted to participate in battles or go to the beach. What would be the result?

No doubt the army's ranks would swell. But the army would no longer be an army, and it would become unfit for its task. So it is when the gospel is altered. Lowering the standards inflates Sunday attendance, but erodes discipleship and obedience. And since only those who do the will of the Father will enter heaven (according to Jesus; see Matt. 7:21), this is not the way to get people ready for their judgment.

Of course sinners would rather hear about God's love for them than God's displeasure with them or His impending judgment upon them. Of course they are more likely to join churches that don't preach against

sin. That is a no-brainer. But is it right in God's eyes to accommodate them?

I'm sure that doctors would rather tell their cancer patients that they are healthy and are going to live long lives. I'm sure their patients would rather hear such diagnoses as well. But doctors tell their patients the truth hoping that they will cooperate and be cured. Likewise, preachers who really love sinners as God does will tell their audiences the truth, hoping that they will repent and be saved. Preachers of repentance are not "hate-preachers" any more than Jesus or John the Baptist were hate-preachers. Rather, it is those who preach of God's supposed fatherly love for sinners, who never mention His righteous wrath or holy hatred, who are the true "hate-preachers." They demonstrate no love at all for their audiences. They are fulfilling Paul's prediction that the last days would see a proliferation of ear-tickling preachers (see 2 Tim. 4:3). They are only sealing the doom of hell-bound people and helping Satan by spreading his lies. They are preparing more chaff for the fire. No exaggeration. And even if they justify their gospel by means of the small percentage of people who are genuinely saved when they hear it, does the accidental salvation of a few justify the deadly deception that seals the doom of thousands?

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world "concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). He does that continually, but so often the church works against Him, broadcasting a message that doesn't convict in the least. When the apostle Paul conversed with unrepentant Governor Felix, Scripture says he spoke to him of "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25a). Sound familiar? And the result? "Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you'" (Acts 24:25b). The Holy Spirit convicted Felix--he was frightened--but he didn't repent. Was Paul a failure? Would it have been better if he had talked to Felix about God's love for him, and how he could just "accept Jesus" and be saved? Perhaps he could have led Felix to Jesus...but it would have been "Vending-Machine Jesus," not Lord Jesus.

Scripture does indeed say that God's kindness leads men to repentance (see Rom. 2:4), but I would suggest reading that phrase in context. As Paul explains his gospel in the first two chapters of Romans, he begins by establishing the two foundational pillars of the gospel, humanity's sinfulness and God's holy wrath against sin (see Rom. 1:15-2:3). Only after that does he make his statement about God's kindness leading people to repentance. That statement is packed before and after with verses about God's holiness and wrath. Read for yourself:

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation (Rom. 2:2-8, emphasis added).

Taken contextually, Paul means that when people realize how kind God has been to them in mercifully stalling His righteous wrath that they fully deserve, they repent. Just telling people that God is kind does not lead them to repentance any more than telling career criminals that judges are kind leads them to become law-abiding citizens.

This gospel that includes sin and judgment has proven to work quite well for Jesus, John the Baptist, the apostles, and countless other preachers over the past 2,000 years. It has spawned every genuine revival in history. It works today in America in thousands of churches, big ones like Times Square Church in New York City, and little ones like the house church I taught at last week in Canada. In either case, the congregations are full of true disciples of Jesus, not typical evangelicals who, as George Barna reports, are virtually indistinguishable from those who make no profession of faith.

4.) What about the Parable of the Lost Sheep? What about when Jesus wept over Jerusalem? Don't those reveal God's love for sinners?

They certainly do, and if you asked those questions, you need to go back and read what I wrote in last month's article, God's Love/Hate Relationship with the World. I never said that God doesn't love sinners. I said that He loves them with an amazing merciful love, and yet from the standpoint of His approving love He hates them, just as Scripture clearly teaches. The Parable of the Lost Sheep certainly reveals something about God's merciful love toward sinners. He is merciful to pursue them. They don't deserve it.

But that parable is not the sum of all truth about God and salvation. It was spoken by Jesus to Pharisees, who didn't understand how someone who claimed to be the Messiah could spend time with sinful people (although they themselves were just as sinful as the sinners they condemned). Loving those Pharisees also with a merciful love, Jesus mercifully took time to explain to them why He spent time with other sinners besides them.

But in one of the next parables, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, spoken to the same group, Jesus revealed a little more about God's merciful love and salvation: God mercifully forgives the repentant.

And when Jesus wept over Jerusalem, His tears weren't tears of joy motivated by an approving love, but tears of mercy, as He thought about their coming judgment. His merciful love is so great. God doesn't want any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (see 2 Pet. 3:9). In light of His holiness, His merciful love for the unrepentant is astounding. But don't forget that the very same Jesus who wept over Jerusalem did nothing to stop the Roman Legions forty years later from crucifying tens of thousands of Jews who rejected Him. It was His sovereign judgment upon them (see Luke 21:22). His mercy ended and His holy hatred was revealed.

5.) The scriptures you cited about God's hatred of sinners were primarily from the Old Testament. Can you show us some from the New Testament?

As I have already stated, the Old Testament is just as much of a testament to the character of Jesus as is the New Testament. Jesus and His Father are one. God never changes (see Mal. 3:6). "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). So if God hates the unrepentant in the Old Testament, He hates them in the New just as much. And His hatred of sinners is certainly revealed all through the New Testament. In every warning of future judgment, in every description of hell by Jesus or the apostles, and in every terrible judgment foretold in the book of Revelation, God's hatred of sinners is strongly shown. Are we to think that God loves the people whom He kills and casts into hell? (Strange love indeed.) As I asked last time, Do people in hell think that God loves them? If God hates them when they are in hell (which He obviously does), when did His hatred begin for them? Are we to think that He cherished them dearly all their lives like a father does his child, and then suddenly, at their death, His attitude toward them completely changed? The answers to these questions are obvious.

The answers to these questions also show us how silly the modern "all-love" gospel has become. Without mention of sin righteousness or judgment (the three things Jesus said the Spirit would convict people of), we tell them,

"Jesus loves you dearly, more than anyone has ever loved you, like a father loves his precious child. Just invite Him into your heart."

"What will happen to me if I don't invite into my heart this Jesus who loves me so dearly?"

"Well, uh, um, well...."

"So what will happen to me if I don't invite into my heart this Jesus who loves me so dearly?"

"He will cast you into hell where you will weep and gnash your teeth as you burn in eternal flames."

Doesn't that message sound just a wee bit inconsistent?

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