**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Love Versus Acceptance**

Thank you and good morning. Welcome to our program.

There have been times when I have preached against the sinful practices of certain ones, and was trying to convince them of their sinful ways, that the remark is made, “but God loves everyone,” meaning “since God loves them, God accepts them as they are.” The person making the statement is telling me, “Don’t condemn their lifestyle. They’re ok because God loves them.”

That raises the question, “Does God’s love for sinners mean He accepts them into His fellowship as they are, and therefore, Christians must not condemn their sinful practices and strive to bring them to repentance?”

It is certainly true that God’s circle of love is universal. God loves everybody. Jesus said, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16). God's love for the world (i.e., people living in the world) is all encompassing and excludes no one. However, to say that God loves all men is not to say that He approves or accepts all men as they are. His circle of acceptance and fellowship is drawn much tighter and is much more exclusive than His circle of love. For example, God loves the child molester, but He does not accept the child molester into His fellowship without repentance on the part of the child molester. God loves the rapist, but He does not accept the rapist into His fellowship without repentance. To emphasize the point that God’s circle of acceptance and fellowship is drawn much tighter than His circle of love, consider with me several passages of scripture.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, *“and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”* Notice, God’s circle of acceptance does not include those who do not know Him and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, God loves those who do not know Him and who do not obey the gospel, but they are excluded from His presence, His acceptance, His fellowship. God desires that they come and obey the gospel and come to know Him. Paul said in 1 Tim. 2:4 that God *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* But if they choose not to come, then they will not be accepted by Him. As a matter of fact, this passage tells us that when Jesus comes, those who reject God and His gospel will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

Jesus said to certain Jews in John 8:24, *“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* In verse 21 He had said to them *“I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.”* This tells us that God’s circle of acceptance does not include those who do not believe in Jesus. Does God love the unbeliever? Sure He does. He loves him enough to try to bring him to faith. This is the reason Jesus told His apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). But if men refuse to believe in Jesus, they cannot go to be where He is.

Also God’s circle of acceptance does not include those who will not repent of their sins. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, *“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* These Jews to whom Jesus is speaking thought they were right with God. But they were not. Jesus says they needed to repent or they would perish.

God’s circle of acceptance does not include those who have been born only once. Jesus said to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:3). In verse 5 He said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* Those who refuse to be born of water and the Spirit will not have fellowship with God.

God’s circle of acceptance does not include the immoral. The apostle Paul said, *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”* (1 Cor. 6:9-10) Today there are fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, drunkards who think that since God loves them, they are accepted by Him. But this passage says that those who are involved in these sins, will not inherit the kingdom of God. They are outside the circle of God’s acceptance.

And God’s circle of acceptance does not include all who walk in darkness. The apostle John wrote, *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”* (1 John 1:5-6)

It is clear from these passages that God’s circle of acceptance encompasses only a small portion of the world’s population. Jesus affirms this fact when He said, *“Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.”* (Matt. 7:13-14).

Why are there few on the straitened way that leads to life? It is because few have chosen to enter in by the narrow gate. God loves everyone and has provided the means by which everyone can enter the narrow gate and have eternal life if he chooses. If he chooses to enter the narrow gate, to believe in Jesus, to repent of his sins, to be born of the water and the spirit, to walk in the light, then he will be forgiven of his sins, have fellowship with God and have eternal life. But if he chooses to walk in darkness, go down the broad way, to live a sinful life, then there is no promise of fellowship with God, and there is no promise of eternal life.

God said to the children of Israel through the prophet Ezekiel, *“‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore turn and live!’”* (Ezek. 18:30-32) Did God love the children of Israel? Indeed! This is the reason God is pleading with them to repent. He loves them and wants them to have life. But for them to have life they must repent of their sins. If they refuse to repent and persist in their sins, God will judge them.

God’s love for sinners does not mean He accepts them in their sins. It means He has done everything necessary to bring them to repentance so they can be forgiven of their sins.

So what about us? Well, we must also draw our circle of love as large as God has drawn His. We must go beyond loving family and friends and love even our enemies. Jesus said, *“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”* (Matt. 5:44-48) If we are children of God we must love as He loves.

But just as God’s love for all mankind does not mean acceptance of their sinful practices, our love for all men must not include our acceptance and approval of their sinful practices. We must avoid any appearance of approving, condoning or accepting attitudes or conduct which God rejects. The world around us, even some members of our own family may call us unloving if we refuse to accept an ungodly lifestyle. They may call us judgmental, bigoted or narrow-minded, but so be it. If God does not accept those sinful practices, and makes efforts to bring the sinner to repentance, should not that be our response to those who are practicing sin. That is exactly what the Lord tells us to do. Ephesians 5:11 says, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”* The “unfruitful works of darkness” are sinful practices. First, Paul says that we are not to have fellowship with them, that is, we are not to participate in those sinful deeds. Secondly, he says, “but rather expose them.” That means we are to bring to light their sins. We must let it be known that these deeds are unfruitful works of darkness. It is not enough that we do not participate in their evil deeds, we must also convict the evil doer by turning the light on his evil practices. Such reprimand is intended not only to bring him to conviction, but also to repentance. Paul told Timothy, *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”* (2 Tim. 4:2) It is not appropriate to smooth-talk sinners. We must help them in love by identifying their sins and exhorting them to do what is right.

That is what love does. That is what God’s love in the heart does. Just as God’s love prompted efforts on His part to bring sinners to repentance, so the love of God in our hearts will prompt us to carry God’s message of repentance to sinful men. The only way sinful man will be saved from his sins and go to heaven is for him to turn from his sinful ways and find forgiveness in Jesus. James says in James 5:19-20, *“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”* That is what we want. We want the sinner to be saved from death. That is the reason we must not condone their sins, but expose their sins. God’s love in our hearts reaches out sacrificially to the sinner to try to save them.

Our time is gone for today. We thank you for listening.

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