

Love versus Acceptance

Intro: I read the Tennessean editorials just about every day. It's probably not the best thing in the world to keep me in good mood; but maybe it's a necessary evil to understand our world. One of the prevailing misconceptions I see repeated almost daily is the idea that because God loves everybody, God accepts everybody and consequently we ought to love and accept everybody (even the sinful in their sins.)

Consider some examples. Recently due to the Metro "gay rights" proposal, floods of letters have been written to defend homosexual conduct.

A recent newspaper clip explains how a local lesbian minister grew up in a church where everybody knew that homosexuality was wrong; but she purportedly came to "believe that God loved her just as she was." And so she serves as an associate pastor in a nearby church while she continues a lesbian relationship.

A member of the church where she preaches recently wrote a letter to the editor saying, "I am proud to be a part of a congregation that is open and affirming to all people. Glendale Baptist desires to create a caring community of equality and grace. That is the kind of church that appeals to me, because it does not erect barriers that prevent anyone from experiencing the amazing love of God." What we are to understand from that statement is that since God loves everybody, he accepts everybody. The code word for approval now is "affirmation".

Another op ed writer wrote: "The god I pray to is a loving God and makes a soul mate for all of us. Some soul mates just wear the same sex."

The critical principle that many do not seem to apprehend is that it is necessary to make a distinction between love and approval (acceptance of sinful conduct). In their mind, to love everyone is to accept them as they are and that this in some way emulates God who also is said to do the same.

God's circle of love

Undoubtedly God's circle of love is universal.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

There is no man, woman, boy or girl that God does not love, and whom He does not seek to save.

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Yet even in these passages that speak of His love, a clear line is drawn between saved and lost. God loves everyone; but his circle of acceptance is much smaller.

God's circle of acceptance or approval

To say that God loves all men is not the same thing as saying that He accepts everyone as they are! His circle of fellowship and acceptance is drawn much tighter and is much more exclusive. God's circle of acceptance excludes:

Those who live in immorality

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Those who do not know him and do not obey the gospel

and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

God does not even accept His children who had accepted if they turn from the light to darkness:

And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (1 John 1:5-6)

Surely, it is clear that God's circle of love and His circle of fellowship are quite different. That's why Jesus said, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life and few are those who find it..." (Mt. 7:14).

Our circles

We need to love all men just as God. Our circle of love must be universal.

Not only our friends, and brethren, but even our enemies

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:44-45,48)

We must love those who society may reject because of prejudice or feelings of social superiority.

Our circle of fellowship should be the same as God. Though we may love all men we must avoid any appearance of approving, condoning, or accepting attitudes or conduct contrary to God's will.

And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; (Ephesians 5:11)

Some may call us unloving when we do this. We may be called judgmental, narrow-minded, or bigoted. Nonetheless, our circle can not be any larger or smaller than Gods!

We need to be careful not be exclusive with an attitude of self-righteousness. It should never give us any pleasure to speak of the sin

of others or to refuse those who will not live as they should. Instead we should feel the deepest grief at their loss (Rom. 9:1). And like Paul, and God we should reach out to them with a love that shows them the way into God's circle of fellowship.

Conclusion: Our message to everyone is that God loves everyone and He demonstrated His love through the gift of His Son to die for our sins. And now He commands all men everywhere to repent of their sins and receive forgiveness through their faith in Jesus Christ

God invites you to join the narrow way that leads to life. We invite you.