

## God's Unconditional Love

To speak of *God's unconditional love* is to utter a wonderful fact about God's nature. He loves because He chooses to love. His love is not dependent upon finding something in us that merits His love. His love is without conditions — it is *unconditional*. This kind of love is expressed in the Lord's words to Israel: <sup>7</sup>“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you *because* you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; <sup>8</sup> but *because* the LORD loves you.” (Deut. 7:7-8a). In other words, God does not love “because” of a reason, but simply “because” He chooses to love.

God's unconditional love is revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments, but in no other place in the entire Bible is there such a detailed description of His love as in the book of Hosea. We are treading on ground we have never been before. We see God's unconditional love coming to the least likely object of love. May the Lord by the Spirit give to us a fresh unveiling of His unconditional love as we look into the book of Hosea.

### *The effect of the revelation*

Let us consider how the revelation of God's unconditional love affects us. First, it affects our relationship to the Lord. Knowing His love, even understanding what God's unconditional love is, will have a tremendous effect on how we relate to the Lord. Second, God's unconditional love also affects how I relate to myself. It affects how I feel about myself and how I understand myself in light of my relationship with God. Third, understanding and enjoying this realm of God's unconditional love greatly affects our relationships with each other as brothers and sisters. Fourth, it affects our relationship to humanity — to fallen man, to those who are lost. And fifth, God's unconditional love affects our relationship to His eternal purpose. God's love

toward us always has a goal in view, and that goal is absolutely related to His purpose being worked out in this universe. So we can see that this matter of God's unconditional love affects all these areas — my relationship with God, with myself, with the saints, with every human being, and with God's eternal purpose.

At the same time, if we lack the revelation of God's love toward us it will also affect all these areas. We may have known the Lord for 20 or 30 years, and yet not know the extent of God's love toward us. Zephaniah 3:17 says, “The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet [rest] you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” God wants to quiet us and rest us in His unconditional love. Our resting place is the love of God.

### *The demonstration of God's unconditional love*

To apprehend the unconditional love of God, we need to see it demonstrated in the book of Hosea. The best way to describe this love is to look into the Word and see God's own utterances about His relationship to His people. We can look at the book of Hosea in two ways: first, look at the condition of the ones that God's love is directed toward; second, look at the nature of the unconditional love of God toward the ones He is loving.

Hosea 1:2-3 says, <sup>2</sup> “When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord. <sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.” God uses Hosea's relationship with Gomer to demonstrate His relationship with His people. By telling Hosea, a righteous, godly man who was the Lord's prophet, to take a wife of whoredoms, or harlotry, God is depicting

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the nature of His love toward us. He tells Hosea to take a woman of harlotry to be his wife. Then He interprets the deeper significance of this act by saying, “for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.” Thus, God wants us to understand through His Word that just as Hosea took a wife to himself in her repulsive condition, so God takes His people to Himself in their repulsive condition. Hosea’s act demonstrates and reveals the nature of God’s unconditional love toward us.

The name of the woman Hosea was to take as a wife reveals even more of the nature of God’s unconditional love. Gomer is derived from a Hebrew word (*gamar*) that means “cease, come to an end, and fail.” In other words, “Go take *failure* to be your wife.” Or, “Go take *that which has come to an end* to be your wife.” This is the nature of God’s love. He loves us when we have no potential, no victory, when we have come to an end — when we are nothing but failure. The Hebrew word Gomer not only means failure, but it also has the meaning of “completion,” or “perfection.” So, this woman is complete or perfected in her harlotry. She has filled up the measure of harlotry to the uttermost. She has not committed merely one transgression but a thousand transgressions. She has reached a state of completion and is ironically spoken of as being perfected in harlotry. She is that low, that base. She is perfected in her harlotry because she is fully experienced in sinning and in rebellion. She is fully developed, perfected, and completed in the realm of failure. She is not partially a failure, but she is a complete failure.

Gomer was the daughter of Diblaim, whose name in Hebrew means “dried, rotten, corrupted figs.” So Hosea was to marry a failure, a woman perfected in her sins, in harlotry, whose mother’s name means corruption and rotteness. This kind of beginning of the book of Hosea depicts the nature of God’s love toward us.

God tells Hosea to take Gomer, this wife of harlotry, to be his wife. Later in chapter 3, God tells him to love her. First He says “take”; then He says “love” this woman. This demonstrates the Lord’s love toward us. He both takes us and then lavishes His love on us.

This Old Testament description of Gomer has a New Testament counterpart. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, <sup>1</sup> “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” These verses describe us as failures, perfected in sinning, rotten and corrupted, living under the dominion of the devil, living out the drives of the flesh, and being by nature children of wrath, even as the rest of mankind. This is the New Testament description of Gomer.

Then verses 4-5a say, <sup>4</sup> “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5a</sup> even

when we were dead in trespasses . . .” Even when we were in that condition, God loved us. Here again is God loving people who are failures, perfected in their failure, and who are spoiled and corrupted to the uttermost. And verses 5b-6 show God demonstrating His love: <sup>5b</sup> “[He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up together, and made us sit together in [the heavenlies] in Christ Jesus.” This unveils the nature of God’s love toward us.

We usually live in the realm and on the level of *our* worthiness and *our* condition. In this realm, whether or not God loves us depends very much upon whether or not *we* feel we are lovable. If we feel we have “measured up” a little bit — that we have had a better week, or have done a few extra good things — then we feel that we can receive the love of God. Many times our perception of God’s attitude toward us is based upon our own feelings about ourself. But in Hosea, the Lord presents the example of Gomer, who is the absolute totality of failure with a mother whose name means corruption and rotteness. Then He tells Hosea to take her in marriage. This shows that though God’s people have departed from Him, they are still the objects of His unconditional love. From this we see that God’s love is far beyond our human concept or our idea.

### *Alluring love*

Hosea chapter 2 continues to describe this woman who symbolizes God’s people. Verse 13 says, “. . . the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers. Then she forgot Me, says the Lord.” She totally forgot the Lord and went after her lovers. We would think the Lord would then respond, “Therefore, behold, I will strike her in judgment.” But it does not say that. He says, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her” (v. 14). Literally, it means “I will speak to her heart.” So here the Lord describes His people who went after other lovers — even other gods, Baals — and completely forgot the Lord. Yet, the nature of God’s love toward His people is such that, even in this state, when she has forgotten Him, and when she has gone to idolatry, He will bring her into the wilderness. That is, He will bring her into an environment, into a circumstance that causes her to feel her need. In that kind of situation, He will attract her, allure her, and seek to win her.

This is God’s love toward the objects of His love. And the objects of His love are simply those whom He has chosen to love. In Romans 9:13 the Lord says, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” So Jacob was the object of God’s love despite his condition — despite his rebellion, his conniving, his deceiving. Despite all that, the Lord followed him as “the hound of heaven.” Wherever Jacob went, the Lord was there alluring him, seeking him, winning him. This is another example of God’s love toward His people,

and it is absolutely an unconditional kind of love. Likewise, there are no conditions to meet here in the book of Hosea. The woman, symbolizing God's people, has forgotten the Lord. She has gone to idols. Nevertheless, despite her state, the Lord says that He will bring her to the wilderness and speak to her heart tenderly. He will do things in order to allure and win her.

### *The meaning of "unconditional" love*

Hosea 3:1a says, "Then the Lord said to me, Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover." This may be translated "loved by a husband." In other words, the husband loves her, indicating Hosea's love for Gomer. Then verse 1 continues, "and is committing adultery." So Hosea took a wife of harlotry, who bore children to him and then continued in that same kind of harlot living. This can be likened to our being regenerated and knowing the Lord for a period of time, and then turning away from Him and going back to our old life-style, or manner of life, and committing spiritual adultery with many other things. Let me say to you categorically that God's love to you is still unconditional because you are the object of His love. It is eternal love based upon an eternal choice, and can never be destroyed or eradicated.

So, in a sense, we are the victims of God's love. Praise the Lord! We are the objects of God's love. The Lord tells Hosea, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a husband and is committing adultery, *just like* the love of the Lord for the children of Israel." These two words "just like" are the key words that reveal the nature of God's unconditional love. Humanly speaking, that woman did not deserve a thing but to be cast off. Yet God says to love that woman "*just like* the love of the Lord for the children of Israel."

This is what the love of the Lord is like. This is how God loves you, and how God loves me. There have been times I have awakened in the morning thinking about my spiritual condition and how I am doing. I have based my relationship with the Lord and His love toward me on my condition. But with this revelation, I wake up with the book of Hosea in my heart, with the unconditional love of God in my heart. It is absolutely a reality that we can rest in His love (Zeph. 3:17).

At the end of Hosea 3:1, the Lord gives more description of the condition of His people: "who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." This indicates that the children of Israel were fully distracted in idolatry, addicted to idolatry. Ephraim is spoken of in this way. At one point Ephraim is joined to idols, fully addicted to idols. An idol is anything that replaces God and usurps God in our life. It does not have to be a statue of Buddha. It can be an automobile. It can be a bank account. It can be a person. It can be a relationship. It can be watching television. It can be whatever gives us pleasure in our flesh. It may give us pleasure, but it can actually be idolatry, because Colossians 3:5 says, "covetousness which is idolatry." Covetousness

refers to having inordinate desires, sinful, pleasurable desires that are directed toward some object. This is idolatry.

Ephraim was joined to idols, and at one point the Lord says, "let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). Then Ephraim came under the allurements and the attraction of the love of God. So at the end of the book of Hosea, the Lord declares that after observing Him and hearing Him and enjoying His love, Ephraim shall say, "What have I to do anymore with idols?" (Hosea 14:8). In other words, Ephraim is enthralled with God's love. Once he was addicted to idolatry, but now he is totally captured by God's love. So he just drops the idols. This is yet another picture of the nature of God's unconditional love.

### *Dependable love*

Now let us look at Hosea 6:1-3: <sup>1</sup>"Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. <sup>2</sup>After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. <sup>3</sup>Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth." On one hand, God's love takes the form of tearing and striking; on the other hand, His love is His coming to us, binding us up, healing us, and raising us up. And both forms of His love are necessary for us to "live in His sight."

Verse 3 says that His going forth is established as the morning. That means His love is absolutely dependable. It is as established as the morning. In this universe, you can depend upon the fact that there will be another morning. How dependable the morning is! And toward you, in your idolatry, in your failure, in your rottenness, in your corruption, in the filling up of your sins, His love is as dependable to you as the morning. That is God's love. That is unconditional love. It is established as the morning.

You can count on the fact that God loves you, not because your condition merits His love, but rather, because God's love issues out of Himself, unrelated to our condition. Ephesians 1:4 says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," and His choosing us was "according to the good pleasure of His will" (v. 5). Thus, out of His own good pleasure, He chose us; He selected us. It did not make any difference what our condition was. As those selected and chosen, we have become the objects of God's love; and this love is dependable. It is eternal and everlasting.

### *Gentle love*

Now let us look at another example of God's unconditional love in Hosea 11:1-4. In verse 1 the Lord declares, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." This verse has a double application: to Israel in their formative years, and to the Lord Jesus in the early years of His life on the earth (Matt. 2:15). In relation

to Israel verse 2 says, "As they called them, so they went from them; they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images." In other words, Israel's sin was not just a little mistake. They purposely sacrificed to other gods, and actually burned incense to carved images. The very ones who knew the living God ran after other loves. They were filled with idolatry and addicted to it.

Then verses 3 and 4 say, <sup>3</sup> "I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them." <sup>4</sup> "I drew them with gentle cords." Gentle cords can be translated "cords of a man." The Lord drew His people with cords of a man, not cords of a beast. They are not the kind of cords that you pull beasts with, but gentle cords. He does not treat us like a beast, but tenderly comes with gentle cords, "with bands of love." Then in verse 4 the Lord continues, "And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them." This means God's love is a stooping love. God's love comes down to where we are. And when we are under a yoke, He removes it. Yet because we have been under a yoke so long, we do not know how to behave without one. We have been in bondage for so long, that when He removes the yoke, we cannot get up by ourselves. So He not only removes the yoke, but He also comes down to where we are and stoops to feed us.

This means that He meets you exactly where you are. The nature of His love does not require that you first come up to a certain level. But just as you are, the way you are, God will come down to you and stoop and feed you. Praise the Lord for this kind of love. This is the gentle nature of God's unconditional love revealed to us in Hosea.

### *Intrinsic love*

Hosea 11:7 says, "My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him." This describes a kind of religious profession that has no heart in it. It is like a person going through the motions of religion, but who in reality is bent on backsliding. This condition is well-described in the lines of a hymn: "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Often we come to a point where we feel like "God can't love me anymore. I've passed the point of no return. He might be able to love others, but not me." This is what happened to John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. For seven years he was under the tyranny of his own thoughts and of the devil; both were telling him that he had committed the unpardonable sin and had gone beyond the love and grace of God. When we there are continual failures, we may feel this way.

Let us just stop ourselves where we are. Do not analyze yourself and base how much God loves you on your own feeling. Instead, look at the Word. Listen to the Lord's reaction to those who are prone to wander, who are addicted to backsliding, who have, so to speak, filled up the measure of their sins in whatever area. In Hosea 11:7 we see Israel

bent on backsliding. Then the Lord says in verse 8, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim?" In Deuteronomy 29:23 Admah and Zeboiim are grouped together with Sodom and Gomorrah. When God gave up Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them, He did the same with Admah and Zeboiim. So here He says, "How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me." This is God.

This shows us that the nature of God's unconditional love is intrinsic to God Himself. That means it is organically a part of Him. Have you ever had compassion toward someone? You felt mercy toward them. It was in you intrinsically. You loved, you wept, you went out to them. It came right out of you, because it was what was in you. God said, "My heart churns within Me." This shows that God's love toward us is not a doctrine to Him. It is intrinsic to His being. It belongs to His nature. It is the way He reacts, the way He feels. Even with Israel in a backslidden condition He says, "My heart churns within Me; My sympathy [compassion] is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man" (Hosea 11:8b-9a). Praise the Lord, our God feels this way.

Oh, may the Lord attract us by this love of God that wins our hearts. Let Him come down and meet you where you are. Let Him stoop and draw you. He does not expect you to even lift up your head. He loves you right *where* you are, just *as* you are. This is the nature of God's love revealed in Hosea; and this love affects our relationship with Him, with ourself, and with one another. This love causes us to shout with Paul to the whole universe that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39).\*

— Bill Freeman

\* This article is taken from chapter 1 of *God's Unconditional Love* by Bill Freeman. This book of 230 pages may be ordered for \$ 7.00, postpaid, from **Ministry Publications**, P. O. Box 12222, Scottsdale, AZ 85267 • Phone: (602) 948-4050 • Fax: (602) 922-1338.

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