



## **Unconditional Love** by Sellers S Crain, Jr

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

The statement is often made that "God loves us unconditionally." That is true of course (see **Romans 5:6-10**). However, the meaning of the word "unconditional" is not clearly understood. God loves all people unconditionally even those who are still living in sin, but He hates sin. While His love is unconditional, He does not condone, approve, or excuse our sins. God hates sin because of what it has done to mankind. He hates it because it separates us from Him now, and unless it is cleansed by the blood of Christ, it will separate us from Him for eternity (**2 Thessalonians 1:9**). One of our Lord's most familiar parables can help to clarify this issue.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11-32**), it must be remembered that the father in the story represents God. It contrast the love, grace and mercy of God compared to that of the Pharisees and scribes. They were murmuring over the fact that Jesus was speaking where many publicans and sinners were it the group. On another occasion when Jesus was eating with publicans and sinners, the Pharisees asked his disciples,

"Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard them, He answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (**Matthew 9:11-13**)

Note that He said He came to "Call sinners to repentance." That call was issued out of God's love for all men requires that they come to repentance.

The Prodigal Son tired of home and the restraints that had been imposed upon him, and he made the decision to leave home and live on his own and to live the way he chose to live. In order to do that he asked his father to give him his inheritance while his father was still alive (**Luke 15:12**). He journeyed into the far country we could call SIN and there he "Wasted his possessions with prodigal living" (v. **13**). He was soon broke and broken, and took on the job of feeding the unclean hogs. Then the lights came on, and he remembered who he was and where he was (v. **17**). Home started looking pretty good to him, and he made the decision to go back and beg his farther to allow him to come back as a slave (vv. **18-19**). The road home had to be longer and harder than the road he traveled to get where he was (v. **20a**).

In the father's actions, we see the true meaning of "unconditional love." He loved his son when he was at home being obedient to him. He loved him even after he demanded his inheritance and left home. He still loved him when he went to live in the far country of sin. He loved him at home, and he loved him in the pig pen. He loved him dressed in fine clothes, and he loved him with dirty hog smelling clothes. He

loved him enough to let him go. He loved him enough to not go after him, but let him come home on his own. He loved him enough to run to meet him kiss and hug him even in his filthy clothes when he saw him afar off (v. **20b**). He loved him enough to throw him a party for coming home (vv. **22;24**). He loved him enough to refute his older son's negative unforgiving spirit (vv. **28-32**).

The question could be asked, "If the father loved him unconditionally, why did he not go and bring him home?" In the two other parables in this chapter, the lost sheep (**Luke 15:4-7**), and the lost coin (**Luke 15:8-10**), we see a contrast. When the woman lost that coin, she began a frantic search to locate it and rejoiced when she found it. When the one sheep went astray, the shepherd left the ninety-nine others and searched until he found it. Why the difference? Why was there such urgency to locate those lost things and none to recover the lost son? The coin had no mind of its own and was not lost because of its own choices. It was because of the woman inattention or carelessness. Sheep are helpless, defenseless animals and are not led by intelligence, but by their natural desires. In this case, greener pastures.

Without the shepherd's concern, the sheep most likely would never have returned on its own. The prodigal son made his own choices, both to leave in the beginning and to return. At that point the father's love did not keep him at home, and it did not cause him to return. He had to reach the point to see his sin and to return of his own volition. Even if the father had gone and found him, until that point, he would likely not have returned. God loves us unconditionally, but if we choose to leave Him, He will let us go, and if and when we return home, He will welcome us, forgive us and rejoice with us.

— Sellers S Crain, Jr, 2023