

Does God love the elect and hate the non-elect?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: QA184

Question:

There are some who teach that God loves only His elect and hates the non-elect. Please comment.

John:

The fact that some sinners are not elected to salvation is no proof that God's attitude toward them is utterly devoid of sincere love. We know from Scripture that God is compassionate, kind, generous, and good even to the most stubborn sinners. Who can deny that these mercies flow out of God's boundless love? Yet it is evident that they are showered even on unrepentant sinners.

I want to acknowledge, however, that explaining God's love toward the reprobate is not as simple as most modern evangelicals want to make it. Clearly there is a sense in which the psalmist's expression, "I hate the assembly of evildoers" (Ps. 26:5) is a reflection of the mind of God. "Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against Thee? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies" (Ps. 139:21-22). Such hatred as the psalmist expressed is a virtue, and we have every reason to conclude that it is a hatred God Himself shares. After all, He did say, "I have hated Esau" (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13). The context reveals God was speaking of a whole race of wicked people. So there is a true and real sense in which Scripture teaches that God hates the wicked.

So an important distinction must be made. God loves believers with a particular love. It is a family love, the ultimate love of an eternal Father for His children. It is the consummate love of a Bridegroom for His bride. It is an eternal love that guarantees their salvation from sin and its ghastly penalty. That special love is reserved for believers alone.

However, limiting this saving, everlasting love to His chosen ones does not render God's compassion, mercy, goodness, and love for the rest of mankind insincere or meaningless. When God invites sinners to repent and receive forgiveness (Isa. 1:18; Matt. 11:28-30), His pleading is from a sincere heart of genuine love. "As I live!" declares the Lord God, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11). Clearly God does love even those who spurn His tender mercy, but it is a different quality of love, and different in degree from His love for His own.

The following Question and Answer was taken from John MacArthur's book,
The God Who Loves
, pp. 14, 16. ©2001 by John MacArthur. All Rights Reserved.

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