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LOVE THAT ENDURES

Most of us experience conditional acceptance, conditional friendship and conditional love. Most of the time, we **give** conditional acceptance, friendship and love. Usually, it is something that we **do** or someone **does** that sets the conditions. Children find acceptance IF they are well behaved, IF they make good grades, IF they excel in sports, IF they are pretty. Adults, find friendship IF they are successful, influential, rich, nice looking, famous, witty. Sometimes in marriages one person will love another IF he or she does what the other wants. People can sense if the Acceptance, Friendship or Love is conditional or not. If we sense that the Acceptance-Friendship-Love is conditional, then we will likely try to find a "better deal" with other people. If no other deal is available, then most will endure the "conditional" relationship rather than have no relationship at all. This may be the reason that really deep and lasting relationships with our acquaintances and friends are so rare. It may also be the reason why so many children cannot wait to get away from home. It is likely why so many marriages fail. I guess that, deep down, all of us realize that conditional acceptance, conditional friendship, and conditional love are based on selfish motives and not on real concern for the other person or even a genuine basic goodness. Conditional love is not real love and has no real power to transform.

We see real love and acceptance in the way God dealt with the nation of Israel and especially the way he deals with every person. "But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners; Christ died for us."

The love of God to Israel was dramatized quite vividly by the prophet Hosea. As part of God's prophetic message to the nation, God had Hosea do some very unusual things.

1 ¶ The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel:

2 ¶ When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."

3 So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. HOSEA 1:1-3

All of the prophets of the Hebrews recorded in the Bible were identified as being from the Southern Kingdom (Judah) except Hosea. The record does not state where he was from; however, his prophecy was directed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Hosea lived during the time of Isaiah and Amos. This was a time of great upheaval among the nations of that area. Assyria was the dominant political and military power and it was the time leading up to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom which was judgement from God because of the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel.

This unfaithfulness of Israel was pictured as the unfaithfulness of a wife to her husband. The relationship between God and Israel was somewhat different from the simple analogy of a husband and wife and this uniqueness is clearly shown in the wife that Hosea selected. He was instructed to find and marry a prostitute. This act was to symbolize the infidelity of Israel to God. The prostitution that Israel practiced involved participation in worship of pagan gods. This practice was equated with spiritual adultery and was condemned by God.

There may be practices that Christians find themselves involved in that could be akin to pagan worship. Fortune tellers, horoscopes, palm reading, tarot cards, and astrology are blatant examples of involvement in pagan religious practice. Transcendental meditation, astral projections, yoga and chanting a mantra are eastern religious practices. Belief in reincarnation and agreeing that it doesn't matter what we believe as long as you live by those principles are denying the truth of the word of God and is a practice of New Age religion. Many believe that mankind is basically good and that he can improve himself and his world by working hard and through education. This is nothing more than the practice of secular, godless humanism that claims that man must "save" himself. Many "Christians" need to be careful regarding what they endorse.

Hosea married the prostitute and they had three children. Later she left him and went back

to her old ways. She was apparently living with another man and had the status of a slave.

1 ¶ The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. HOSEA 3:1-2

The marriage of Hosea to Gomer was a picture of God rescuing the children of Israel from Egypt. Eventually, Israel had gone away from God and had participated in pagan religions. Time after time, they would have to be rescued from the nations that oppressed them. This continual care of God for His people is pictured in Hosea going to find his unfaithful wife and buying her back. This was a very unusual thing for a husband to do. If a wife had been so unfaithful, then most men would have not wanted to have anything further to do with such a woman. This is evidence of conditional love. The fact that God redeemed Israel time after time is evidence of a kind of love that endures because it is based on the character of God and not on what Israel did or did not do.

4 ¶ "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.

5 Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.

6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. HOSEA 6:4-6

The actions of Israel caused God much grief. The lament is that of a person that has tried about everything he knows to do to help another person. I would imagine that the spouse of an alcoholic could identify with God's frustration with Israel who would repent often but it was a repentance that did not last. It did not seem to matter what God did for them. He sent prophets that spoke clearly to warn them of impending judgement. Trouble did come to the nation and this would result in brief reform, but no lasting changes took place.

They would even practice the ritualistic worship rites of sacrifices but they failed to see that God really wanted them to become as He is in love and mercy toward others. If they would come to know the character of God and then walk in that nature, then God would have been pleased with them. The same is true today.

1 ¶ "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.

3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them.

4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. HOSEA 11:1-4

In an effort to appeal to the nation of Israel, God had Hosea use a number of analogies to characterize the relationship He had with them. One was that of a Father bringing up a son and helping him to learn to walk. He did so in a manner that was loving and humane. God tried to draw Israel to Himself with His blessings and His love. This is still the method He uses today to draw people to Himself: "For God so loved the world . . ."