

# Do You Love God?

## I Corinthians 16:13-14, 22

When I told Danny that I was going to preach on three short verses, he immediately said, “You are going to preach a Puritan Sermon.” If you are not familiar with the Puritans, they were deeply committed Christians who wanted to purify the Church. They wanted their Christian faith to matter in every aspect of their lives. And they were known for expounding on one or two verses with great fervor. I guess this sermon in some way follows the pattern of the Puritans...

Outside of Christian circles, I have sometimes heard this statement: Go to Hell. Typically, these sentiments are not ones that I would think appropriate coming from someone who has the love of God actively compelling them to action.

But in verse 22 of I Corinthians 16, Paul comes pretty close to voicing these same sentiments.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 16:22** If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Corinthians 16:22** If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.

It is difficult in English to capture the essence of Paul’s meaning.

Let him be accursed is a very accurate translation, but it sounds too academic. There isn’t a whole lot of force behind the words.

The KJV has Anathema. Anathema is really not a translation. It is a transliteration. This is how the Greek word actually is pronounced: Anathema.

That can be said with the necessary feeling: HETO ANATHEMA

The problem is that most of us are not even sure what Anathema means. Basically, it means complete and utter destruction.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Numbers 21:3** And the LORD obeyed the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah.<sup>1</sup>

When God wanted to make clear that an individual or a people were receiving his ultimate wrath of condemnation, the terminology used was “devoted to destruction.” The Hebrew word is Herem. In this verse conjugated as “Hormah”. The root can be used positively of complete and total dedication TO God. Being complete set apart or holy to God. The opposite is also true of complete and total destruction apart from God.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew OT is very helpful here. They translate the Hebrew “Herem” as “anathema”. So it is very clear that when Paul uses the Greek word Anathema, he is using it to mean complete and total destruction. What is the place of complete and total destruction apart from the Lord? Hell.

Add to this the verb that Paul joins with Anathema which is a command form of “to be”. “Let him be” is accurate, but probably does not communicate the force. “May he be Anathema” or “May he be utterly and completely destroyed eternally.”

You see where I am going with this – It is not a stretch to say that Paul’s meaning is “May he burn in hell!!!” Add to this the statement: Maranatha!

This statement, depending upon where you place the accent can mean one of two things:

1. Our Lord has come!
2. Our Lord come!

If the first is intended, the meaning is that because Jesus has truly come and made himself known as Lord, it is absolutely imperative that we love him. If you do not love him, then you will indeed experience his wrath.

**Psalms 2:12** <sup>12</sup> Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

But the second is also possible and maybe even likely. The meaning then is that Paul wants Jesus to return and judge all who refuse to love him. It is similar to John’s statement at the end of the book of Revelation:

**Revelation 22:20** <sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Let’s put it all together:

**MET 1 Corinthians 16:22** If anyone has no love for the Lord, may he burn in Hell. May Jesus come and judge him soon!

Does that sound harsh to our ears?

Does that sound contradictory to a book that is devoted to encouraging love? Rather than sit in judgment upon Scripture, or God for that matter, it is far more important that we accept the truth in this statement and learn to respond to it rightly.

Let me make the statement that this verse proclaims:

Those who do not love Jesus will be judged to an eternity in hell. This is NOT the same thing as saying that your love to God saves you. It is ultimately not your love of God that saves you, but rather God’s love for you. But, while only God’s love for you brings salvation, salvation always results in our loving God. If you have NO genuine love for God, you are not saved and should fear God’s wrath over you.

So, while the world constantly encourages us to “love ourselves”, it is far more important that we learn to love God. It is good to search your heart: Do I love God?

Testimony: The Older I get, the more distant it seems. But it is good for you who do not know my testimony to know it. And for those of you who already know it, bear with me. And if what I share raises other questions, do not be afraid to ask them later.

I grew up in the Church. I attended Sunday School and VBS. I went to church camp and sang the songs. I would have told you that I loved God. I had no awareness of the depth of my sin, and my love of self.

It wasn't until I started dating that God showed me the truth of my selfish heart. After dating for a short while, our relationship turned sexual. And after a few months, she came to me and told me that she was pregnant. I wanted nothing to do with the responsibility of being a husband or a parent. I was only 14 years old at the time. And scared.

Somehow, by God's grace, he helped me to search my heart. And I began to realize that all of my actions towards my girlfriend were selfish. I was not acting in true love towards her. I was driven by my selfish love for myself. And what was worse, I was entirely willing to leave God behind.

I followed God when he made me feel good, but I had no true commitment to God. For the first time in my life, I realized that I did not love God.

But the solution was NOT – just start loving God. Salvation is NOT just doing better. Salvation can only occur as we receive and embrace God's love for us in Christ.

For the first time in my life, I believed that that I was NOT good and that I had NOT loved God. And because of this I knew that God was entirely right to be angry with me and to cast me into the darkness of hell.

I remember thinking to myself, "God, you should send me to hell. I deserve it." As I looked at the selfishness of my heart, I hated myself, and I believed God should hate me too. But, at the same time that I believed God would be perfectly right in sending me to hell, I did not want to go to hell.

I remember wanting to be saved, but not knowing if God would still love me enough to want to save me.

Thank God for a friend, Steve Perry, who knew more of the Gospel than I did. We played basketball together. I put a note in his shoe, telling him the whole situation, and tried to not hide any of the selfish actions I had committed. I was certain that he would not want to be my friend after he knew all that I had done. That afternoon, he called me up. This was the extent of our phone conversation: "Hey Mike, I got your note. Do you want to come bale hay with me?"

That was it. He began to take me to Bible Studies and give me Christian books to read. But it was in that moment that I first began to believe that God could still love me.

In the weeks to come, I remember crying on my bed every night asking God to do two things:

1. Forgive and cleanse me from my sin.
2. Change me such that I would love God, and those around me.

There was no audible message. I was reading the Bible, but I cannot tell you where in the Bible I read. After a few weeks of intense turmoil, I distinctly remember an inner sense that God did love me, and that he had forgiven me. I knew that Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient to save even a sinner like me. At that time, I was full of God's love for me. And that love compelled me to strive every day to love God in return.

That was some 37 years ago. I wish I could tell you that I have always loved God with perfect devotion and obedience. As I get older, I can see more and more ways that I still struggle to love God and others. At no point have I loved God with the perfection with which he has loved me. I am so thankful that my salvation relies upon his love and not my own.

But for the most part, I have sought to love God throughout my life. I have had some moments and some seasons where I have lived for my own selfish desires. These times cause more shame because I know how much God has poured out his love into my heart. Sinning against such great love is my greatest shame.

But the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit has been faithful to continue softening my heart to his love and bringing me back to repentance. It is the desire of my heart to love God with all of heart, soul, strength and mind. But it is also the ongoing debt that I owe to God for how much he has loved me.

### **Romans 13:8** <sup>8</sup> Owe no one anything, except to love each other

The Bible does not say how much we must love God to be saved.

This is similar to the fact that the Bible does not say how much holiness is necessary to be saved.

It just says that “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

I think that to ask the question of how much is itself a problem.

Honey, how much do I have to love you for you to accept my proposal in marriage?

Guys, don't propose this way. Love is difficult to measure. But to ask “How much?” reveals a heart that does not love.

Ask any true Christian on their death bed whether they have loved God “enough”, and their universal answer will be, “No, I have not. I am looking forward to seeing Jesus face to face when I will begin to love him perfectly.”

But to have no love for God, no genuine love. All such people will burn in hell. And as those who love our Lord, we should not think this somehow wrong. Certainly, we want God to save sinners. We do pray for the redemption of the lost. But we should also look forward to the day when all who refuse to love Him are cast into eternal hell.

May all who refuse to love Jesus, burn in hell when he comes to judge the world. That is hard for me to say. But it is biblical. We must learn to think more about the greatness of the offense that is occurring when people hate our Lord.

Paul is speaking to believers. In the opening verses of this letter he calls them saints – meaning those who have been declared holy through the blood of Jesus, and washed by the inner working of the Holy Spirit. And strangely enough, he wants those who are called saints, to beware that they do not become “those who do not love the Lord.”

How do we avoid becoming a person who does not love the Lord?

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

<sup>13</sup> **Be watchful,**

What are we supposed to be watching?

For the health of our own soul. And for the attacks of Satan upon it.

Whether or not the temptations to love the world have replaced Jesus at the center of our hearts. And whether or not our faith in the Lord Jesus remains true and strong.

We are to keep a close watch on whether or not our love for God is growing cold.

Watchfulness is vigilance. We are to be vigilant, knowing that our hearts are deceitful. We are to be careful that we have not strayed from the truth that is found only in Christ Jesus.

The Greek word is “gregoreo” which is sometimes translated: Stay awake.

I am not a horror fan. I do not like them. And I do not recommend them. But as a kid, I watched a good number. The only one that I truly remember being afraid was “Nightmare on Elm Street”. They made several. Only remember watching the first one. I don’t remember much about the plot, if there is a plot in horror films. But I do remember one thing: The evil enemy, Freddie Krueger, could not harm you while you were awake. He could only attack you if you fell asleep. But if you did fall asleep, he could kill you, not only in your dreams, but in reality. The whole movie was characters trying not to fall asleep. And of course, all they ever did was fall asleep.

Staying alert against our spiritual enemies is not easy. Oftentimes we begin dozing off and we are not even aware of it.

How are we to be watchful?

Believe that Jesus could come at any time. What would you do to prepare for Jesus if you knew he was coming tomorrow? How would you spend your day today?

You would not spend it in an attempt to get as much sin in today before he comes.

No, you would be confessing sins.

You would be searching your heart.

You would be pleading for mercy.

You would spend time in prayer and in the study of God’s Word.

You may reach out to some unbeliever calling them to Christ.

You would be preparing your heart for the moment when you see him face to face.

The security of a believer is precious. But if your idea of security means that you no longer have to be watchful, then you have a wrong conception of security. The promises of the gospel are only realized in those who are living by faith in them. The security that we have as believers is that as we genuinely trust in Jesus he is sure to save us. There is no security for those who care little about their sin and who have no real hunger to intimately know Jesus Christ. As Calvinists, we believe that this faith and this hunger are gifts from God. They do not arise from us. But to have assurance that we are saved without them is not biblical.

Yes, brother and sister, those who are baptized members of the Church, you must stay awake. You must continue to keep watch over your soul, looking to the coming of Jesus Christ.

The second exhortation on how to avoid becoming a person who does not love God:

**Stand firm in the faith.**

We live in a cultural current that is opposed to the Bible.

The culture has never truly encouraged godliness. But the depth of the current is rising. Instead of being around your ankles. It is above your knees. And the higher it rises, the more difficult it is to maintain your footing.

Standing firm, like staying awake, requires effort and determination and care. The faith is nothing less than the Bible, and the doctrines that the Bible teaches. And to stand firm “in the faith” is to relentlessly remain loyal to the Bible. “We owe to Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God.” John Calvin

One of the ways that the world erodes your ability to stand firm in the faith is to raise doubts as to the reliability of the truths that we have been taught.

Every vital truth of Christianity has been challenged. Pick any doctrine of the faith and it has been denied, or at least questioned. With so many other interpretations, how is it possible to hold strongly to ours? It requires time, and humility, thoughtfulness, and courage. If you ignore doubts, they will not go away. We must do something about them.

As a young Christian, the Bible quickly became my source of life. Every page contained some new truth that was helpful to my growth in the Lord.

I would talk to others about what I was learning. It did not take long to realize that others did not accept the truths that I was seeing. They either rejected the Bible altogether, or they had different interpretations as to its meaning. Who was I to think that my interpretation was the right one? That is a good question. We must not assume that we are right. We are very capable of being wrong. And arrogance in our beliefs is not a good thing. Others have been wrong. What makes me think that I am above being wrong?

But while arrogance in our beliefs is terrible, even worse is the failure to have certainty in your faith. If you read the Bible, it demands that we give up things to follow Christ. We cannot make sacrifices for Christ unless we have certainty that what we believe is true.

Take the truth that those who do not love God will be judged to an eternity in hell. If you doubt whether or not that this is true, you will not be able to overcome your fears of upsetting those around you to tell them. If it is only one view of many, then you will not stand firm in it.

You cannot simply leave doubts in your brain. You must diligently take the time and effort, with a teachable heart, to study. You must weigh the options. You must talk with other godly people. And you must make a choice to stand on your conclusions.

But sadly, many people are not willing to take the time or the effort. Settling some doubts takes more time and effort than others. I wrestled for years before I came to the conclusion that the Reformed Faith was biblical. During that time there was a good bit of torment in my heart.

David Wegener – He was my Sunday School teacher. He was a man of godliness. And he was very knowledgeable. I went to him and asked him to meet with me to help me with my doubts of the Reformed Faith. He chose a systematic theology by James Montgomery Boice for us to study together. We would read on our own. And when we met I would pelt him with my questions and doubts. For almost a year, he patiently answered my questions, until finally, I

came to him and said, "Alright, I cannot fight anymore. I am convinced that the Reformed Faith is biblical."

I will never regret the time that I took to know what I believed. Overcoming all doubt may not be possible in this life. But dealing with doubts must be a lifelong commitment.

You will not be able to stand firm against the currents around you if you do not work hard to learn your faith.

Books over blogs.

Learning from those who have gone before you.

Learning doctrine and embracing it is not all there is to the faith.

But you cannot love God if you are not also standing firm in the faith.

Standing firm in the faith is developing in your heart a loyalty to the faith.

And that loyalty surpasses all other loyalties.

And remaining loyal to the truth takes courage.

Paul's next exhortation is to "**act like men.**" It is important to see that this command is not given only to men. It is given to men and to women, and even to children. There is a virtue that is particularly appropriate to men, but which every Christian must possess as a Christian. What virtue are we talking about?

Courage... Bravery...

The Greek word is derived from the root Andros = man.

One virtue that ought to be instilled in young boys is that of being brave, being courageous. But in reality, it ought to be instilled in our young girls as well.

Merriam Webster

courage = mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty

Wikipedia

courage = the choice and willingness to confront agony, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation.

Aristotle states "courage involves deliberate choice in the face of painful or fearful circumstances for the sake of a worthy goal"

Winston Churchill observed: "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities . . . because it is the quality which guarantees all others."

Thomas Aquinas argues that Courage is a virtue which... can only be exemplified with the presence of the Christian virtues: faith, hope, and mercy. In other words, if you are not also displaying faith, hope and love, you are not being courageous.

This helps us to see that courage is more than simply being tough.

And courage is not the absence of fear. Courage faces fear, and is not enslaved to it.

We are not born courageous.

Courage is built over time by making brave choices, however small, on a regular basis.

Present Middle Imperative = that means that you do not choose to be brave once and you are good to go. It is ongoing.

Courage is developed as you think less of yourself and more of others or of some cause larger than yourself.

For the Christian, it takes courage to live for the will of God.

It takes courage to obey his commands in the face of threat and opposition.

ESV **Joshua 1:9** Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

be strong.

Again, we are not talking about physical strength so much as moral strength of character. And this strength is not something that you generate within yourself. It is derived from the presence of God and the strength of his character.

ESV **1 Samuel 30:6** And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul,<sup>1</sup> each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

What is the context here?

David is at war with the Amalekites.

They have just made a raid and taken captive David's family, and the women and children of others in David's army, and burned the homes in which they lived.

How would you feel at that moment? Those dearest to you are hostage to your enemies.

But more than this, your own people are now questioning your leadership. You are their leader. You are to protect them. But rather than protection, the enemy has taken away the loved ones of those you are sworn to protect. You have failed. Those who trusted in you also believe you have failed them.

They are ready to stone you. You see yourself as a failure. What do you do?

You retreat to some solitary place and wallow in your own shame and failure?

Not David...

David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

As Christians, we fail. We experience the bitterness of falling short. Our strength is not enough. But the end of our strength is not the end.

We are to find new strength when we have come to the end of our own.

We are to seek strength from our God.

**Psalm 105:4** <sup>4</sup> Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

The presence of God instills strength. But often this strength is not immediately felt. It is something that is first laid hold of by faith.

**Psalm 27:13 - 14** <sup>13</sup> I believe<sup>1</sup> that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! <sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

I believe...

I believe that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, against every other voice that is screaming against me to quit, or to admit defeat, I will continue to hope. Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

To be a Christian is hard. God promises to protect us. But he also will take us to the end of our strength. He will push us beyond where we ever thought possible.

We all need the exhortation to be strong! There is a choice that must be made in the depth of our hearts that we are not going to quit. We are going to continue fighting for what is right. We are going to seek obedience even when it gets tough. But, there is also a humility that knows that we do not possess the strength within ourselves. And so, like David, we seek the LORD.

And we wait upon Him.

Lastly, Paul says in verse 14:

<sup>14</sup> **Let all that you do be done in love.**

To do something "in love" is to be motivated primarily by love. This statement is so universal, so comprehensive.

Even the worst sinner can do something in love.

The difficulty comes not with doing an occasional act of love, but with being motivated by true love in every situation. Let all that you do be done in love.

First, let every action that you ever do be done out of love for God.

And then, let those same actions be done out of love for others.

First, being motivated out of love for God.

"In the exercise of true love to any object there is pleasure taken in the object itself. Thus, the excellence of God is the foundation of all sincere love to Him. True love to God essentially consists in being pleased that He is just such a Being as He is." Gardner Spring

"The love of God is the first and highest affection of the renovated heart." Gardner Spring

Certainly, our love for God flows from His love for us. But if our affections only rise to the level of what God does for us, they remain ultimately selfish.

"If a man, in his supposed love to God, has no ultimate regard except to his happiness, if he delights in God, not for what He is, but for what He is to him; in such a sentiment there is no moral virtue. There is indeed great love of self, but no true love to God." Spring

This was the greatness of Job. Satan believed that Job only loved God because God gave Job all he wanted. God knew better.

God gives Satan permission to rob Job of all that was dear to him. And Job refuses to curse God.

Now, certainly, Job was not perfect. And when God finally speaks to Job, his perspective of his God is raised to a whole new level. Job is an example of someone who loved his God, not simply for the gifts that came from him.

Do you live your life out of a love for God?

We also must strive to live such that every choice we make is a choice of love towards someone else.

Maudie

Husband and wife are talking one day.

She mentions to him that it would be nice to have a screen door to keep out the insects.

For some reason, the husband is opposed to the idea. We are not sure why.

Maudie gently makes her case that the screen door would really make life easier for her.

The discussion ends with the husband adamantly declaring that they were NOT going to have a screen door.

Maudie is disappointed, but drops the issue.

The next scene that you see is the husband installing a screen door.

Nothing is said.

Maudie simply smiles.

Why does she smile?

Because she knows that the only reason that her husband installed that screen door was because he loved her. He cared about her.

When I take the time to reflect upon my choices, I am appalled at how much I am still motivated selfishly.

I believe that God has answered prayers to change me from that selfish 14 year old. I am not who I once was. But I am far from doing everything in love. If you are honest, the same is true of you.

This realization can be discouraging at times.

But this discouragement should only drive us back to Christ.

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He is able to give us strength for today.

But he is also fuels our hope for eternity.

That day when all who dwell in his kingdom will only and always act in love. If you have this hope, you will say with Paul: Maranatha!

Our Lord, come!

**2 Corinthians 13:14** <sup>14</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.