



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XII
Issue 288

God's Unconditional Love

by — Clyde L. Pilkington Jr.

Did you know that the Scripture teaches that God is love? Even though religion may attempt to state this, it is hard to accept based on their slanderous portrayal of Him.

A real look at the Scripture will acquaint you with a *God of love*. The *happy God* (I Timothy 1:11) is love (I John 4:8); and He sheds abroad His love in our hearts (Romans 5:5; i.e., “pours out,” CLT, Rotherham; “floods,” Moffatt, Weymouth).

Did you know that God loves you, that He loves you just as you are, and that His love for you is unconditional?

Religion says “God’s love is conditional” – that is, God loves you if you meet certain conditions. The idea is that God will love you “if” ... if you do certain things, and don’t do certain other things. This is one of the myths of religion.

Unconditional love is one of God’s wonderful gifts to you. Religion will try to force you into wearing some kind of façade so you can approach God; but you don’t have to be someone other than who you are for God to love you. After all, God made you who you are. The realization of this, and of His great unconditional love, will actually set you free from religion and its manipulative bondage.

God’s love is not premised on a condition; it is not contingent on something within us, something that we must do, something that we must achieve.

Calvary’s love is at the very heart of the good news – *real* good news – not some consolation prize for those who are “good.” The Lord Jesus Christ showcased the divine love of the Father for His children.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

But God demonstrated His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).



Out of one side of its mouth religion will tell us of the love of God, and then out of the other that He will send the overwhelming majority of His creation to suffer the pains of eternal conscious torment. Such a view abandons any concept of unconditional love.

Since God is not a man, His love is not human, but divine. One of the greatest human loves is that of family (of a man for a woman, of a mother and father for their children); and yet God’s love is far superior.

We are all the offspring of God, He is our Father (Acts 17:29). God gave us earthly families that we may know, in some small measure, the nature of His Fatherly love for us. Parental love can be unconditional, and yet it pales in comparison to that of our heavenly Father’s. His love is unwaveringly fixed upon us as the object of His love; and divine “*love never fails*” (I Corinthians 13:8). The endless endurance of divine love can be seen in the love that the Lord manifests toward us:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:35).

Our Creator is our Dad: we are His children, and we are on a journey to learn the limitlessness, the boundlessness of His love toward us.

This supreme principle can affect every relationship we have. It begins with our relationship with our Father, but then extends on out to all with whom we have relationships. Thus we see everyone differently through the prism of God’s unconditional love.

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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The Divinely Appointed Contrasts of Life

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Life is all about contrasts. They are everywhere and in everything. This is how we learn.

The very first verse of the Bible introduces us to *divinely appointed contrasts*. In the beginning God created two contrasting spheres: *the heaven, and the earth*. This is a key contrast that continues throughout the entire Scripture. When God makes things that are different, they are not the same.

In fact, *divinely appointed contrasts* are at the heart of understanding the Scriptures. This is addressed by Paul as he gives his final instruction to Timothy:

*Study to show yourself approved to God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the Word of Truth** (II Timothy 2:15).*

God has designed a certain way by which we are to study the Scriptures: “*rightly dividing*,” or “*correctly cutting*” (Concordant) them. Simply put, we must learn to make a difference where God makes a difference. This is the divinely approved approach to the study of His Word.

This is the goal of Philippians 1:10, “*So that you may recognize **things that are different***,” because things that are different are not the same. This is the number one principle of Bible study, and it is introduced to us in the very first verse of Scripture.

Contrasts are God’s education tools in our divine course of instruction. God has literally filled His Word and our lives with these critical contrasts. If we can learn this, we will understand one of the most important principles of life:

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| God / Man | Poverty / Wealth | Love / Hate | Circumcision / Uncircumcision |
| Adam / Christ | Feast / Famine | Truth / Error | |
| Male / Female | Drought / Flood | Hard / Soft | Prophecy / Mystery |
| Heaven / Earth | Rough / Smooth | Strength / Weakness | Israel / Body of Christ |
| Divine / Human | Good / Evil | Honor / Dishonor | Forgiveness / Justification |
| Adult / Child | Sweet / Bitter | Large / Small | Asleep / Awake |
| Day / Night | Sharp / Dull | Front / Back | Bondage / Liberty |
| Black / White | Snow / Rain | Up / Down | Spirit / Flesh |
| Sunshine / Rain | Joy / Sorrow | Wet / Dry | Mortality / Immortality |
| Hot / Cold | Happy / Sad | War / Peace | Corruption / Incorruption |
| Hungry / Full | Victory / Defeat | Sin / Righteousness | Visible / Invisible |
| Summer / Winter | Absolute / Relative | Law / Grace | Terrestrial / Celestial |
| Spring / Autumn | Objective / Subjective | Peter / Paul | Life / Death |
| Sickness / Health | Ease / Pain | | |

These are all carefully designed contrasts from God’s hand – and make no mistake about it: these contrasts are *all* His creation. They are His firmly established method of teaching us.

God uses contrasts to bring us to divine knowledge and to a true appreciation of Who He really is, so that we may with joy and thanksgiving appreciate all that flows

from His benevolent nature. In this principle of contrasts we ultimately will find the answers to all of our questions of life.

If we can realize this principle, we can learn to take a deep breath and relax.

A.E. Knoch, in his classic work, *The Problem of Evil*, ►

helps us understand the divine necessity for such contrasts:

Before they sinned, Adam and Eve had no knowledge of good. Good lay all about them, unmixed with evil. Health, strength, honor and companionship with one another and with God was their constant possession and privilege. Yet they knew nothing of the blessedness of these boons [benefits]. This we learn from the name given to the tree which bore the forbidden fruit. To many minds it suggests only the knowledge of evil, rather than good. Yet, first and foremost, it was the tree of the knowledge of good.

Thus at the very forefront of revelation we have the principle suggested which is the key to unlock the great problems that most perplex us. It is this: *All knowledge is relative: it is based on contrast*. The knowledge of good is dependent upon the knowledge of evil. Hence the tree in the garden was not, as we usually think of it, merely the means of knowing evil, it was the means, primarily, of the knowledge of good. Adam and Eve had good, but did not realize it because they had had no experience of evil.

The perfection of Eden's garden was greatly lacking in the one element most dear to God's heart: Adam did not and could not apprehend God's goodness. There is not the slightest hint of Adam's appreciation or thanks, or worship or adoration. He received all as a matter of course and was quite incapable of discerning or responding even to that measure of divine love which lies on the surface of His goodness. If we should suddenly be transformed into glorious sinless beings and transported to such scenes of sylvan perfection, we would exult and praise the Author of our bliss. Not so with Adam. He knew no joy, for he knew no misery. He knew no good, for he knew no evil.

This point is most important, and we press it because it seems to be universally ignored and misrepresented. The garden of Eden has become a symbol of perfect bliss; we are always being reminded of its delights, and the happiness of the first pair has passed into a proverb. Yet there is not the slightest reason to suppose that Adam was delighted, or enjoyed the bliss ascribed to him. The mere possession of good does not give a knowledge or realization of it. ... Adam had perfect health, but what was that to one who never had even heard of disease? He had

abundant food, but that was nothing to him who had never felt a famine. Even pleasure had no appeal to one who had known no pain.

The fatal lack in all of the perfection of Eden was the utter absence of any note of praise or thankfulness. Knowing no good, and utterly unacquainted with mercy or grace, Adam's heart was utterly incapable of love or adoration or worship. God's goodness did not receive the least response, because it was unknown. All that He had bestowed on Adam failed to kindle the affection for which He longed, and which is the goal of all of His gifts.

How could this grave defect be remedied? There was but one way, and that way was, in the wisdom of God, provided by the tree which He placed in the midst of the garden. Had Adam and Eve known good they would have treasured God's goodness and never would have forfeited it by disobeying His command. Yet, when they did eat of the tree, they set in motion the very forces which would remedy the defect which caused them to do it. What divine wisdom do we see here displayed! God's blessings being unappreciated, they offend Him by their deed and in so doing pave the way for an appreciation which satisfies both. Love is a marvelous schemer! ...

Had Adam never sinned he would have been a neutral, a sentient clod unfit for the full companionship of his Creator. Of one thing we may be sure: He would never have known evil; and we may be equally sure that he never would have known good. He would not curse God for sin, neither would he thank Him for His beneficence nor adore Him for His grace. He would have utterly failed to fulfill the purpose of His creation. We must always remember that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had a double function. No one forgets that it brought the knowledge of *evil*; but it was primarily the tree of the knowledge of *good*. Adam had no appreciation of the good by which he was surrounded. Having known nothing else, it was not good to him. He received it as a matter of course, without a thankful thought.

Adam could have lived on indefinitely in such an unappreciated paradise, but only with untold loss to himself and to his Creator. All that he saw was God's hand; His heart was veiled. Some means must

(see **CONTRASTS**, page 2658)

“Accountability” and “Covering”

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

A dangerous religious fad has developed over the past couple of decades: it's the teaching of so-called “Christian accountability” and “accountability partners.” We are told that Christians need to be “held accountable” by their church, their clergy, and to each other. According to this seductive trend, Christians are to report regularly to whomever they are deemed “accountable,” reporting to them, confessing to them their failures and weaknesses, so that they may be “held accountable” by them. This is a sad step back into a Protestant form of the Catholic confessional.

If you walk with God outside of man-made religious organizations, you are apt to hear such questions as:

“Who is your covering?”

“To whom are you accountable?”

“What church are you under?”

“Who is your spiritual covering?”

“Whose authority are you under?”

Of course, if someone genuinely was to have the right to hold another person *accountable*, they would actually need to have *authority* over that person to do so. In other words, to be able to hold someone else “accountable” legitimately, one must have *jurisdiction* over the person being held “accountable.” The believer has been “*bought with a price*,” and belongs directly under the jurisdiction of only God Himself.

WARNING: There are those among us who would play God, if we allowed them!

For you suffer, if a man brings you into bondage, if a man devours you, if a man takes of you, if a man exalts himself, if a man smites you on the face (II Corinthians 11:20).

There is no hierarchy or rulership claims over, or between believers. It's impossible and contrary to Scripture for one believer to be “held accountable” to another, as members of Christ's body.¹

This does not leave us “unaccountable.” No – quite the contrary! We definitely give an account; but the question is: To whom do we give this account?

To an “accountability partner”?

To a self-imposed “clergyman”?

To a man-made “church”?

No! Paul made it abundantly clear that we – every one of us – will give an account of ourselves directly to God Himself.

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:12).

What about a so-called spiritual “covering”² of others in our lives? Well, listen to God talking to Israel about their taking counsel and cover from someone other than Him.

“Woe to the rebellious children,” says the LORD, “who take counsel, but not of Me; and who cover with a covering, but not of My spirit” (Isaiah 30:1).

No clergyman (Reverend, “pastor,” priest, minister, “bishop,” or “elder”!), no “covering church,” (“fellowship” or “ministry”), nor “accountability partner”

(see **COVERING**, next page)

1. Of course, if believers also have additional divinely appointed relationships, such as family or work (i.e., parent/child, or employee/employer), there is accountability; but this is based on this unique relationship. For example, a believing child is accountable to a believing parent, as a *child*, but not as a believer; likewise a believing employee is accountable to a believing employer, as an *employee*, but not as a believer.
2. The husband/father has been provided by God as a covering for his wife/children, but this relationship is domestic, and does not extend to believers with each other.

COVERING (continued from previous page)

has the right to hold *anyone* “accountable,” or to provide “cover” for others.

Not even Paul, our apostle, took on such a self-imposed role among believers.

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith you stand (II Corinthians 1:24).

Who are you who judge another man's servant? To his own Master he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand (Romans 14:4).

Religious “accountability” continually focuses on *behavior* and *sin*. It is the sin of Galatia: a humanistic, legalistic approach to righteousness, holiness and sanctification. Paul did not teach that someone needed to “keep us in line.” The believer’s life is all about God Himself, “*for in Him we live, and move, and have our being*” (Acts 17:28), and “*it is God Who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 3:13).

The believer’s life is about growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Peter 3:18). The believer has died with Christ to the elemental principles of this world, so why, as though still belonging to them, do we allow ourselves to be subject to them: “*Touch Not! Taste Not! Handle Not!*” (Colossians 2:20-23)? We should be unaffected by those who attempt to

lord over us.

With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by man's judgment ... (I Corinthians 4:3).

Others may choose to “hold us accountable” or judge us. However sincere their actions may be, or appear to be, we are not to be affected by this. When we, like Paul, walk before the Lord, their verdicts will be a “*very small thing*” in our sight, and God’s. In fact, if we are concerned about their opinions, it will have a hindering effect on God’s work in us.

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10).

Thus, we have Paul’s instruction,

Let no man therefore judge you ... (Colossians 2:16)

Do not surrender or forfeit the freedom that you have in Christ to the abuses of organized religion that pawns off itself as being God’s representative. Stand free in Christ, regardless of what religion says!

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

CONTRASTS (continued from page 2656)

be found to rouse Adam’s affectionate response to the Divine yearnings. He must learn to appreciate good. How shall this be done?

It is a notable fact, and full of significance, that the tree of which Adam ate was no afterthought with God. Adam’s ignorance of good did not lead to its planting. It was already grown and bearing fruit. Moreover, it was not hidden in some distant corner, in an impenetrable thicket, unapproachable and forbidding. It was in the very midst of the garden, accessible, and desirable in every way. If it was simply a question of keeping Adam from eating its fruit, it could easily have been removed. Far simpler yet, it need never have been planted.

God alone was responsible for all of the accessories in Adam’s transgression. It is of still greater significance that it combined in itself two inseparable functions. Perhaps we would have preferred one tree to teach the knowledge of good, and another to initiate into the knowledge of evil; but this is impossible in the very nature of things. We may strive to conceive of light apart from darkness, but it proves impossible. Light may drive out all darkness, yet its realization depends on its opposite. So good cannot be known by human beings, apart from evil.

– *The Problem of Evil and the Judgments of God*, pages 27-28, 34-35

Vessels of Up-Building

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

... Follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Romans 14:19).

Did you know that God has called us to a life of *up-building*, that we are His chosen vessels to such a *grand purpose*?

In the divinely established principle of contrasts – where all about us is constant conflict, division, strife, contention, hatred, judgment, rejection and tearing down – we are His *contrasting* instruments of reconciliation, peace, love, grace, acceptance, and building up.

The English word *edify* simply means to “build up.” It is akin to the word “edifice” – a building, a structure. This is also the meaning of the Greek word *oikodomē*. Thus some translations use the words “*build up*,”¹ or “*upbuilding*”² in this verse.

Paul lays out our divine course – *following* peace and edifying each other. Obviously, we are not to do so to the detriment of truth – for there can be no *true* peace or building apart from the truth – but we are to be in *constant pursuit* of peace and edification, they are to be our lofty aim. Listen again carefully to Paul’s words,

... Follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Romans 14:19).

Opposition to the truth is divisive enough on its own; so, Paul pleads that we must *actively* seek out the divine path of peace and building up.

If it is possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18).

... Let all things be done to edifying (I Corinthians 14:26).

Paul tells us that the Body of Christ is to be “*edifying itself in love*” (Ephesians 4:16). He tells us that what comes out of our mouths should be,

that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

Edification (building up) is the opposite of destruction (tearing down). Twice Paul tells the saints at Corinth that his own divine authority as an apostle was given to him by the Lord “*for edification, and **not** for destruction*” (II Corinthians 10:8; 13:10). After all, he told them that edification was his own personal aim *in all things*.

... We do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying (II Corinthians 12:19).

Even Paul did not seek “*dominion over their faith*,” but desired to be “*helpers of their joy*” (II Corinthians 1:24).

This, too, should be our own heartfelt aim – with all that is within us (“*as much as lies in you*”). *And there is a lot in us!* Paul tells us that God, our Father, is in us (Ephesians 4:6), as is His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:27). Rich, abundant, unexhausting resources for overflowing love, grace, peace and edification!

The world is in desperate need of such a contrast. There are so many empty, hurting, rejected, broken lives.

Paul’s passion was to live *constructively* (edification, up-building), not *destructively* (tearing down). His actions were bold, but not mindless. They were thoughtful and with purpose, “*for the use of edifying*” (*i.e.*, for the purpose of *building up*.)

Paul also knew that divine up-building was found only in faith: “*godly edifying which is in faith*” (I Timothy 1:4); and that faith was to be found only in God’s Word (*c.f.* Romans 10:17). Therefore, he actively and boldly taught the truth, doing so in the context of love, grace, peace and edification. In fact, he revealed to us that the Body of Christ actually “*edifies itself in love*” (Ephesians 4:16); and the use of such edification “*ministers grace*” (Ephesians 4:29).

(see **VESSELS**, next page)

1. *e.g. An Understandable Version, Darby, Emphatic Diaglot, Moffatt, Youngs.*

2. *e.g. Rotherham, Weymouth, Williams.*

VESSELS (continued from previous page)

Edification is the divine process of escorting one to true freedom in Christ through the indispensable means of *faith, love and grace*. These are the powerfully *constructive* principles of *edification* that God brings to bear in the details of our daily life.

Let us always remember that we are God's chosen vessels of *up-building*, rather than *down-tearing*. Let's not join the world in its role. We are Father's instruments of loving and peaceful edification. This is our divine calling. One of my very favorite songs is sung by Ricky Skaggs and is called "*The Mind of Christ*." It was written by Michael Puryear and Geoff Thurman, and has in it this wonderful line: "*to build up when others tear down*." I am moved to tears every time I listen to this song. Here are its lyrics.

The Mind of Christ

To receive when others reject,
To treat each one with true respect.
To shield when others throw stones,

To be with one who's all alone.
To think and choose to see the very best,
To live like this is nothing less than to possess

The mind of Christ, my highest goal,
The Lord's delight, the desire of my soul.
The Father's heart will always guide my life,
If I will have in me the mind of Christ.

To build up when others tear down,
To seek the lost until their found.
To give grace where it's needed most,
Rejecting pride when others boast.
To sacrifice my all without regret,
To live like this is nothing less than to possess

The mind of Christ, my highest goal,
The Lord's delight, the desire of my soul.
The Father's heart will always guide my life,
If I will have in me the mind of Christ.

Just How Much "God" Is Your God?

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The answer to this question will greatly affect your daily life. That God *is* God seems so basic enough that it goes without saying; but over and over in Scripture God reasserts His Godhood. The reason? There are those who would teach of a "god" who is somehow something less than "God."

Just how much "God" is God?

He is **ALL** God!

... **I am God** ... (Genesis 35:11; 46:3; Psalm 46:10; 50:7; Isaiah 43:12; 45:22; 46:9; Ezekiel 28:9; Hosea 11:9).

We learn a lot about God from His name. The basic Hebrew word used for God is **EL**. The word means "Placer, Subjector." God is the **EL** of Scripture. He is the Supreme Placer, the Supreme Subjector.

EL is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and omniparous. That is, He is able to do all; He knows all; He is present everywhere at the same time; and He is the producer of all.

He is the Creator, the Owner and the Proprietor. He is Planner and Executor. He is Supplier and Sustainer. He wills all, He orders all, He directs all. He is **GOD!**

Sadly, there are some who would teach of "a god" who somehow is less than THE GOD. That "he" can't seem to manage to do exactly what "he" wants to do, and that "he" is somehow actually subject to "his" own creatures. This may be "a god" of religion, but it is not THE GOD of Scripture.

Purely and simply, regardless of what His creatures may assert to the contrary, *the true and living God of Scripture is 100% absolute God and Sovereign of His Own universe.*

Regardless of what man says about God to the contrary, God **is** God! Period.

Rest in that.