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## Mini Study

### God Is Love...?

*'Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'* (1 Samuel 15:3 CEV)

*'God is love, and anyone who doesn't love others has never known him'* (1 John 4:8 CEV)

Now there's a conundrum. How do you get your head round those two texts? *'I am love personified - but go kill everyone,'* says God. One, of course, was Old Testament, and one New. But then God says He is *'the same yesterday and forever.'* It's a puzzle that theologians wrestle with. It's a question that many a thinker and many a layman has considered. And it is used as an excuse for rejecting the God of the Christian Scriptures - the Bible. Can the two apparent sides to God's character be reconciled?

- 'Gods' are legion. Every faith looks to its 'god' - or in Hinduism its myriad 'gods.' Yet there is no consensus as to what he (or she) wants.: how to behave, what to believe, the purpose for mankind. And 'god' is often made in the image of his believer.
- Based on behaviour, the god of Islam would likely choose the Samuel text (above) in their pursuit of growth. For Christians it is 'God is love,' though that faith launched the mediaeval Crusades in the name of their god.
- The LORD of the Christian Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, lays claim to be the one and only God, while acknowledging the existence of other claimants to be 'gods' (Heb. *elohim* - eg Deuteronomy 17:4). There can, of course, be but one such supreme God. And He says *'I change not'* (Malachi 3:6)
- On the one hand this God is 'love' and on the other He authorises the 'ethnic cleansing' of entire nations (1 Samuel 15) - and indeed of virtually all mankind, as in the great flood in Noah's day: *'... Jehovah said, I will wipe off man whom I have created from the face of the earth, from man to beast, to the creeping thing and to the birds of the heavens; for I repent that I made them'* (Genesis 6:7 LITV)
- No whim, this, but an essential step towards the fulfilment of His purpose. The whole of creation had overstepped the bounds of civilized behaviour: *'And Jehovah saw that the evil of man was great on the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the day long'* (Genesis 6:5 LITV). Much like today!
- Mankind was, at his creation, *'very good.'* Straight from the hand of God he was in the divine image: *'And God created the man in His own image; in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female'* (Genesis 1:27 LITV). 'Perfect' - but with freedom to choose how to live: follow God's path, or devise his own. He, influenced by the Adversary, chose his own way - which led to assured destruction. The LORD began again with one righteous family, that of Noah (Genesis 9:1-2)

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- The pattern was repeated in ensuing centuries. When nations corrupted themselves God, for the sake of His grand design, having given them time to change (*eg* Genesis 15:16, ch 19:24). Yet through all this the unchanging divine character is described as '*gracious and merciful*' (*eg* II Chronicles 30:9), having '*loving kindness*' (Psalm 51:1). Remember this is the *Old Testament*! Consider, too, the New Testament teachings: '*...out of His mouth goes forth a sharp sword, that with it He might smite the nations...*' (Revelation 19:15). That speaks of the not-so-gentle Jesus, who will come '*in flaming fire, giving full vengeance to those not knowing God, and to those not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,*' (II Thessalonians 1:8 LITV). Perhaps it's time to bring our understanding of *divine love* into line with God's.
- All those men, women and children - wiped out by divine command - died that we might live. Had their corruption infected all mankind we would not exist! Speaking of the 'end time' Jesus said: '*And except those days were shortened, not any flesh would be saved...*' (Matthew 24:22 LITV). But for the sake of 'the elect' the LORD will intervene to end the mayhem.
- God, however, has plans even for such: '*And they will come out [of their graves], the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment*' (John 5:29 LITV). After the thousand-year reign of Jesus they will, by means of a resurrection to a period of assessment in the flesh, be educated to *God's* way. *His* love is more comprehensive than man can imagine (Romans 8:38-39)

(All Scripture references are ASV unless otherwise noted.)

*Published by:*  
The Churches of God Outreach Ministries  
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Tulsa, OK 74155-0621  
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