

## God So Loved – What Would You Do for Love?

Dr. Glenn Robertson

John 3:16

The theme for this week of Advent is love. What could speak more of love than God's love in sending His Son to save us from our sins? Here is that so well known verse, John 3:16. I want to focus on the first part.

### John 3:16 NIVO

**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

Note:

#### The only Son of God.

(Thayer, Lex.) *μονογενής*, *μονογενής* (*μόνος* and *γένος*) (Cicero, *unigena*; Vulgate (in Luke *unicus*, elsewhere) and in ecclesiastical writings *unigenitus*).

Sum: It can mean only Son, although it may mean a unique Son in that Jesus existed as the Logos eternally prior to incarnation. He is not son by human means. He possess the Spirit of God and not the sinful, fallen spirit in man. Yet, he is a Son, a man in full flesh. He is God's only Son, unique from all mankind.

What is more, he is God the Father's Son. His coming into the world, as Jesus is expressing, is God's greatest act of love. So, the emphasis for this week's Advent theme of love is that God paid the ultimate price of love to redeem us from sin.

We think about love. We act in love, perhaps every day. In fact, love is a very common theme and emotion for us.

We say things like, "I love you." We smile to people as an expression of love. We give hugs – an assurance of being loved.

People will chat, flirt, go out of their way to meet a person so as to hopefully fall in love. It is funny, though, a man can know full well how to fight on the battlefield, but when it comes to asking out the girl he is interested in, he can't seem to get the bullets in the gun.

People will sail the ocean to pursue love - or go to a camp retreat and find an excuse to come back early so he can take a chance on asking a girl out. (Someone I know.) It would be fun to hear everyone's love story. How did you get started?

Yet, when we think about love - romantic, social or caring – all of our loves come back to one love, by One Lover, the divine. As John the Apostle says, we would know nothing about love except that first God has loved us. (1Jn 4:19). We know what love is because God revealed love to us by sending His Son to our world. (1Jn 4:10) We talk a lot about agape love, but agape is the word the Apostles chose to describe God's love in sending His Son. This "God so loved" - unique act of love is the highest order of love, all our loves draw from it. The Greek for this word is of course *apape*. It is wrong to say that God's love looks like *agape*, rather, agape looks like God's love, for God's love is His nature.

*Agape* is like God Himself. It is not merely a part of God. It is God himself. Whatever we think about love, we owe it to God. It is God who created us as mortal beings in His image, in bodies of male and female that can give love and respond to love.

Jesus is saying, "This is what God did for love." God so loved he gave. This is what God did for our salvation. "God so loved." This is grace – "God so loved."

#### What would you do for love?

I am not asking what you would do to find love. I am asking what would you do to express love?

Love like light is known to us by different colors, like the different colors we see reflected in a diamond. Red, green, yellow, blue... All the same light shining in different hues. So also, love is different aspects of the same essential nature – God's love expressed as *agape*.

I will tell you, it is no less love to speak of *eros* than *philea*. It is no less love for a man to pursue a wife, to talk long on the phone, send endless texts, notes, flowers, spend enormous time with her at every moment possible in courtship. This is *eros* as much as the sensual love expressed behind closed doors. *Eros* is the emotional bond and the pursuit of the object of one's love. It is a hue of love in a degree. *Philea* is love in a different hue. With *philea* we think of friendship. That devotion to help a friend at great cost. To be brothers in arms defending each other's back. *Storge*, you don't hear of this word much, but it is the love expressed in family love. A daddy's love for his son or daughter. Yet, *agape* can clearly be seen in all of these, as much as devotion, commitment and sacrifice are all involved. I would suggest in terms of light, *Agape* is the pure light representing divine love, all other loves are refractions from the source.

The only thing we must be careful about is selfishness pretending to be love. The love that only focuses on satisfying one's selfish heart is often paraded as love. "I love this..." Even many of the "I love you's" are really more like, "I feel good because I am with you". Yet, a self-serving love is more indulgence than love.

So, God's love as the source of all love, *agape*, is the pure light. All of our loves are some aspect of a reflection of His love. The purest example is God sending His Son to save us. God so loved, He gave! He sent his only Son to save us from judgment. Here is the pure light. Here is the reason we celebrate Christ's birth every Christmas. If God had not sent His Son, the world would still be in darkness.

Yet, we can speak of love in a biblical sense in some other hues. Three hues fit well into the *agape* sense of love and reflect well on the nature of God. In photography we use three colors: RGB, red, green and blue. Here are three colors of love that give us an image of God's love. Our hues will be **TCS**.

**Truth, Commitment, and Sacrifice.**

### **Love is Truth**

Greek philosophy formed the foundation for Western civilization and modern thought. They loved to pursue truth with reason. They sought to describe reality through rational thought. In a sense, they sought to define

reality. Their philosophers were taken up into the Roman world, and from their to the modern world.

Homer:

Hateful to me as the gates of Hades is that man who hides one thing in his heart and speaks another. (Iliad 1. 158).

Hippocrates:

There are in fact only two things: science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter ignorance. (Law)

Ancient philosophers pursued truth. I don't know they ever found it.

Jesus said he is truth. He said, you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (Jn 8:32) He is way, the truth and the life. No one gets to the Father except through Him because he is the truth. (Jn 14:6)

The cynic Pilate argued, What is truth? (Jn 18:38)

Truth is God. He is the creator, the designer out of whose mind all designers and thinkers have ever come. As such, truth is objective, not merely emotional because truth comes from God the designer and creator. Yet, in our day young people are convinced that truth is relative and pure emotion.

For example, in our day, we hear, "Love wins." It is the ultimate example of trumping objective reality according to the standard of subjective feeling. Yet, that is what modern culture wants. It no longer wants truth to be a reality based on facts. Feelings are the only truth. Yet, in the end, it will be a poor way to view love. If everything people feel they love must be given the high ground of reality that cannot be questioned, then some day we will have to approve of the most sadistic and cruel murders because after all it is what some people love and perhaps how they self-identify. Love wins, why not that?

It would be much like if a doctor were to say to you, "Well, cancer after all is really just part of you. You should embrace it. Your body has developed new and wonderful ways to grow." We would say of such a doctor, "you are crazy." **Is it love to approve that which ultimately harms?** Yet, that is the

falsehood that modern society is claiming as truth when it says “love wins,” after all, it is a form of love.

To love in the sense of divine love is to embrace truth as what is real and ultimately good. To be true in love is also part of the image of agape love.

### **Love is Commitment**

If agape can be described as something we do, it would surely include commitment. Being faithful, here, is the key concept. Love is faithful to the one it claims to love. Without faithful, love means nothing but a craving of desire. I can love chocolate. But I don't have to be faithful to it.

Commitment and faithful speaks of covenantal love. We think of covenant during weddings where the bride and groom give wedding vows. What are those vows? They are a swearing of a covenant to each other and to God. When we say, “I do,” we are giving the pledge of the covenant. Covenants are the way ancients made formal commitments. This lawyers and contracts. They made pledges and sealed their pledges with some form of rite. The important thing is the pledge had to be carried out in faithfulness, a commitment to the pledge.

Here, again, God is the first light to this hue. God makes and keeps covenant. He keeps his Word, his promises. We see him make a covenant with the rainbow after the flood. He makes a covenant with Abraham. He makes a covenant with Israel at Sinai. He made a covenant at the cross.

We see others making covenants. David made a covenant with Jonathan that he would not totally wipe out Saul's line. Long after Saul and Jonathan were dead and gone, David kept his covenant. He brought a member of Jonathan's house into his house and fed him at his table.

We can talk about how marriage should have faithful love. It should have commitment because you made a pledge to a covenant. However, my point is not to drive the issue of what we should do, but to recognize that when we do act in faithfulness we are actually reflecting on the greater love that we find in God. God is faithful. He always is faithful.

At Christmas we reflect on the faithfulness of God in His promise to send the Christ, and now indeed He has. Jesus' coming in the world is the great act of God's faithfulness both to Israel as a nation and to the world. He so loved he sent His only Son. His Son, Jesus is God's faithfulness in love to save us from our sins. “God so loved the world!”

Not everyone sees it. I watched a Jewish scribe on Facebook say that Jesus is no where in Isaiah 53. I've been praying for him that God would open his eyes.

Jesus came because God is faithful to his promises to send His Savior. “He was crushed for our transgressions... by his wounds, we are healed.” (Is 53:4-5) Jesus is the fullest expression of God's faithful love. Moreover, this Jesus came to be the sacrifice for sin.

### **Love is Sacrifice**

The last hue to see out of the light of God's love, *agape*, is that of sacrifice. In Jesus we see God's love sets aside self to save another. Our text is “God so loved.” He loved to send His only Son to save us by his death on the cross.

God's love is a sacrifice. It is the greatest love story the world has ever seen. God who is judge, sends the Spirit of himself in human flesh so the eternal one can die to pay our penalty for sinning against God. I spoke last week about the joy set before Jesus. I said the joy set before Jesus (Heb. 12:3) was that he would have many sons and daughters. He looked beyond the pain of the cross to the victory after the cross. God the Father also looked beyond the cross. He looked to the glorification of Jesus and all those who belong to him. God won this through his sacrifice.

This sacrificial love is seen in family life at times. When a parent pays a debt for a wayward child or pays to rehab an addicted son or daughter. Sacrificing to save prodigals happens a lot. Such acts of love come at great personal cost.

Sacrifice is one of the hues of God's love. We see it best on the cross and by those who pick up the cross.

*Agape* is our best attempt to describe not the ideals of love from a human perspective, but the nature of love as we see it in God sending His own Son to the cross. While we love to celebrate the beauty of Mary giving birth to baby Jesus, and kissing the face of God (as in the song, *Mary Did You Know*), the bigger picture is act of God's love bringing us redemption. I share this with you because we are all trying our best to figure out how to be good at love. What we mean by love is usually *agape*, and that kind of love is what we see in "God so loved."

We are told so many times in Scripture to love.

We are to love our neighbor as our self. (Mt 22:39)

We are to love the brethren, as Christ has loved us. (Jn 15:12, 1 Jn 4:11)

We husbands are to love our wives as Christ has loved the church, by laying down his life for her. Again, the idea of sacrifice. (Eph 5:25)

But I raised a question in my sermon title that I have not addressed yet.  
What would you do for love?

### **What would you do for love?**

I don't mean, what would you do win someone over to your love or to fall in love. I am going to guess you can figure that out. What I mean is: what are you willing to do to express love?

I think we need to find these three virtues again:

Love as truth,

Love as commitment, and

Love as sacrifice.

If you allow the Jesus who came on Christmas morning to infiltrate your heart, he will impress those ideas into your love.

### **Would you – so love?**