

## **Superlative Love with Unparalleled Dimensions**

(John 3: 16)

By Rev. Thomas Cosmades

The manifold fruit of the Spirit unfolds itself with love at the top of the list (cf. Galatians 5:20). In our depraved world people often make some reference to love, but this is a borrowed concept with no appreciation that genuine love is a personalized axiom: "God is love" (I John 4:8, 16). The God of the universe sent his only begotten Son to the oikoumene to validate his love in an astounding discharge: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The bizarre picture of the world is one where everybody mentions love in certain ways without ever attaining to its factual evidence. The lamentable absence of the One whom humans have jettisoned is imperceptible. Some people do touch upon love but fear is seldom referred to, in spite of its appalling grip on our race. Fallen men don't seem to realize that fear can be dispelled only through the love of the One they reject. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18a). Jesus Christ is inviting everyone to become recipients of his superlative love. This love cannot be obtained elsewhere or be compared with anything. The Divine Love took human flesh and bones, living among the sons and daughters of Adam.

### **I. LOVE ETERNAL**

It ought to be acknowledged that the love of the everlasting God can only be eternal. "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jeremiah 31:3). In New Testament language it is stated as: "...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Ephesians 1:4; cf. I Peter 1:20; John 15:16; 17:24). God's love is the only love which enfolds all men and women in every generation. Its effect reaches back to the eons before the beginning of anything. This is the supreme flawless love which prevailed between the eternal Father and his Son. In the fullness of time, it was extended to needy humans, embracing them in their most basic exigency: "...when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1b). This is infinite love, fully satisfying every recipient. It could only be attained through the Incarnation which is rejected by many, even though it is the pillar of the Only Faith. While absurd to many, it is absolutely acceptable to others. It carries with it the element of unacceptability, but it is gratefully appreciated by many. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:1, 2; cf. Ephesians 2:4, 5). Only God can love unconditionally. Christ did not set limits on his love. He loved everyone, never wavered between the good and the bad. Man's spite and hatred could not make any dent in Christ's love.

### **II. LOVE UNIVERSAL**

True Christianity accepts the Father and the Son as equally eternal and universal in hronos and kronos (time and space). "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him'" (John 14:6, 7). God does not do anything which does not encompass the whole universe. The Creator of the Cosmos provided universal salvation: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The preposition 'so' in John 3:16 tells the unlimited nature of his love, as well as its universal effect. This offers the opportunity to every person in the world to be recipient of Christ's love. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2b). The Father and the Son proffer the commission on everyone who has believed to explain this peerless love to others: (cf. Isaiah 6:8; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15).

In all ages, particularly in ours, the universality of Christ and his Gospel is determinedly rejected. The question stands out: Is it possible to duplicate a similar joyful Good News which responds to human distress with such universal implications? "The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (Psalm 33:5b). The Good News is God's message to his historic people, i.e., the Jews, and to the nations still without the living, redeeming God: "...the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (Ephesians 3:6; cf. 2:16-19).

### III. LOVE SACRIFICIAL

Beyond any doubt, love is the most effective mode of communication. In Christ, 'giving love' became flesh, lived our life, took our sin, paid for our deserved punishment and died our death. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. We love, because he first loved us" (I John 4:10, 19). This love was first told in the Protevangelium, from which point on the Triune God was preparing the effectuation of his tender care. This love was accentuated to the Ephesian elders in arresting terms: "...remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35b; cf. Romans 8:5, 8, 32, 35, 39). Do we pause to consider that the eternal Father abandoned the Son on the Cross, whom he had loved eternally? During that short space of time, he was transferring to us that love. Supreme love required supreme sacrifice. We ought ever to remember Christ's agonizing cry from the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; cf. II Corinthians 5:21; 9:15).

A major religion which daily occupies world headlines is known for its doctrine of submission or surrender to Allah, i.e., Islam, taslim. The religion dwells primarily on this concept, but who is this Allah? A monolithic, impersonal, punitively unitarian, a demanding and exacting stern being with no component of love given to his creatures. He is stripped of his high position of fatherhood with his creatures who are left orphans on earth. In contrast to such a hold, the Christian submits with gratitude to the love of a personal, living, saving God who manifests himself through the 'giving love' of his only-begotten Son. This is the essential difference between the two.

### IV. LOVE INVITATIONAL

God's universal invitation expounded by the Old Testament evangelists is often quoted. "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). Man has no recompense for God's free offer. His Son paid all with his precious life and blood. Christ described it with an invitation to the banquet (cf. Matthew 22:1-10; Luke 14:16-24). Each one responded with his particular excuse for non-attendance. When we receive an invitation to a reception, underneath there is a request, RSVP. God's invitation to spiritually starving and thirsting people everywhere, carries no RSVP. He simply says, "You are invited." However, in the foremost invitational text considered here, i.e., John 3:16, there is a somber warning: "Whoever believes in him should not perish".

God's love extended to everyone in the spirit of freedom and liberty carries with it the most frightening alarm signal, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life...He who believes in the Son has eternal life, he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (John 5:24; 3:36). We couldn't imagine a wedding invitation carrying the disturbing reminder: "You better accept our invitation; otherwise you will be doomed." Utterly appalling! However, God says exactly this. His tender bidding carries with it the serious reminder of inescapable consequences. Here on earth the person who invites you to a banquet will not lose much if you refuse his invitation. On the other hand, every individual who spurns God's call grieves him. Secondly, this person negates the effect of God's love and provision for his own life. The peril of rejecting the love of the Father's dear Son lays the person open to eternal judgment.

Justification, righteousness, love and life everlasting have another item incorporated into the same package: divine retribution. His loving invitation can only be treated in the affirmative. Negative response will inevitably bring the just consequence. Christ is the only person who added no condition to his love. He loved unconditionally. He was the only person who walked on earth with limitless love. Now he is expecting you to make your free choice by yielding yourself to his unique provision. Then you will enjoy freedom in every respect. Free from the bondage of sin, free to live a liberated life, a free citizen of Christ's kingdom, living forever in absolute freedom.



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