

FOR GOD SO LOVED THAT HE GAVE

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son . . .” (John 3:16)

I am told that the ancients reduced reality to four basic fundamentals: air, earth, fire, and water. There is, however, another reality without which the world cannot survive. It is love! Love is as real as the air we breathe and as mysterious as the phenomenon of fire. It can be seen around us each day in an infinite number of ways. It is love that causes a fierce animal to gently caress the tiny bundle of fluff that came from her own womb. It is love that causes tiny birds to die in defense of the little ones in their nest. It is love that causes a man to lay down his life for a friend. Without this thing called “love” the world as we know it could not exist. The nature of love is such that the one who loves, denies self and gives to others.

John 3:16, as you know, has been called the “Golden Text” of the Bible. In a few brief words this inspired verse strikes a responsive chord with all thinking people. For God so loved that He gave. These words are so simple that they are invariably among the first words of Scripture that little children commit to memory. At the same time these words are also so utterly profound that the world’s wisest men cannot completely comprehend them. For God so loved that He gave. In these few words we have not only the world’s greatest giver, but also the world’s greatest gift. Paradoxically, both giver and gift are the same. The gift that God gave to the world was Himself.

For God so loved that He gave. The intrinsic nature of God combined with the inherent nature of love provided no other alternative. If God was to be God, and love was to be love, it had to be that way. The very nature of God is to love, and the very nature of love is to give. God could not be God without love, and love could not be love without giving.

For God so loved that He gave. He turned His back upon the regal splendor of heaven for a life of abject poverty in a world of trouble. He said “no” to omnipotence and came struggling from a virgin’s womb so utterly helpless that he could not have survived a single day without love. God’s very nature inspired Joseph and Mary to care for the baby Jesus. His fragile little body was tenderly wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. His tiny lungs were filled with the noxious odor of animal waste and manger dust. But God was God, and love was love, and Jesus Christ was on a collision course with destiny.

For God so loved that He gave. He put away His carpenter’s tools a final time and again turned his back on self. His very nature demanded that He focus on the needs of others. Therefore, He did not stay on the side lines but became involved in the game of life to the hilt. He dared to touch lepers, and eat with social outcasts and sinners. No task was too difficult and no risk too great for Him to bring the beauty of a sunset to blinded eyes, or the melody of a song to deafened ears. Because He loved, He gave. His selfless life brought laughter to little children and beautiful dreams to the aged and infirm.

For God so loved that He gave. The ultimate expression of His love was seen at Calvary. The night before the cross Jesus fell on His face in Gethsemane and cried out to the Father. His sweat turned crimson in the light of the Passover moon and He said: “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me”. An angel came to minister to Him in that hour of agony and need. Empowered by love, Jesus said: “Not my will, but Thine be done”. These poignant words reflect the very essence of love for love does not insist upon having its own way. Love is so utterly selfless that it inevitably expresses itself in a benevolent outreach to others. 1 John 3:16 puts it like this: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”.

For God so loved that He gave. Others aspects of His divine nature pale by comparison. Faith and hope abide to help us understand the Sovereign of the Universe, but both will ultimately disappear in the light of eternity. Love, by contrast, abides forever. It never fails! Love existed before the creation of a single atom, and it will remain triumphant when our present universe has vanished into oblivion. Love is the very essence of His nature, His word, and His church. By this shall all men know that we belong to Him, if we have love one for another (John 13:35).