

Russ Martin - No Greater Love

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The title we're going to consider this morning is no Greater Love, embodied in probably just two lines of that. The first verse of the hymn we sung, Father, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art.

But to think about the human perspective of this, there was a song back in the mid-80s. Yeah, that was 40 years ago, and I remember it. But it was called the Greatest Love of All, sung by a woman with just a tremendous voice, Whitney Houston. She's the late Whitney Houston right now. The chorus of that song stated that learning to love yourself was the greatest love of all.

Well, today we're most certainly going to disagree with the sentiments of that song. That's really all we'll say about it. The scriptures made clear precisely what the greatest manifestation of love is and was and will always be. No doubt you recognize the scripture that our title draws upon. It's John 15:13.

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends or his brethren. Two points here. Not surprisingly, the word love here is agape, and we will elaborate on this shortly in a very short time. But we'd like to focus a little on the word translated.

No man.

It embodies both the genders and the word mankind, as the word mankind would. But it is more than that. It has additional emphasis embodied in that phrase. Not anyone, man, woman or thing has any greater love than that shown by laying down his life for his friend, his brother or his son. Jesus was inclined that up to this point he had treated those learning these words as mere followers or serpsents, servants inferior to the Master.

But from this point on, and really from Pentecost on, they would be peers, friends, brothers.

Certainly there is no greater love among man than self sacrificing love. But as we'll see in a little while, we will find an even greater love than this. A love born of a higher nature. A divine love. One reason we wanted to consider this topic is best summarized by a short reference in reprint 4982.

Christianity has another superiority over all other religions, and that is it recognizes a love and compassion upon the part of God that no other religion recognizes. They recognize we believe the same one God, but do not recognize his real traits of character. They perceive his justice and their own transgressions of divine justice, but they do not see the merciful provision that God has made. So let us just quickly go over those words translated love in the New Testament.

As you know, the New Testament uses just two words for love to describe it.

Strong's word 5638 is filio and it means a duty love, an affection or a friendly or to be fond of. This term is often used to describe the love one would have toward a natural family member. They feel an obligation to respect their parents and siblings.

Agape, on the other hand, is Strong's word 26 and it has a much deeper meaning. It signifies a disinterested love. But that term can be misleading. Being disinterested does not mean it may sound like but it does not mean that you don't aren't interested in the one you're loving. What it means is disinterested in the sense that the well being or benefit of the one giving the love has no

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interest in that.

That's not their motivation. If I have agape love for you, it is not interested in what I gain for having that love. Nor is it particularly interested in what I may get in return for my love. It is a love which sacrifices one's own interests. Brother Russell, in many of his articles, additionally talks of three aspects of love.

The lowest of these aspects to love is a love of pity, a love which one has because he pities the object of that love. The converse is not necessarily true. Just because you pity something or someone does not mean that you have a lowly love for that one. But a love born out of nothing but pity is one in which there is not much affection or devotion. For example, we may pity the poor of this world because many of their living standards is so much lower than we enjoy.

Or we may pity an animal who is injured or abused. We may have no real attachment to these. We cannot directly exercise our love for them to their immediate benefit. The emphatic love is definitely a form of filial love. It is a duty love in that we feel some obligation toward the person or thing because of their condition.

That next higher form of love of the three is a sympathetic form of love. In this form of love there is some interaction on which love is based. It is based on fellowship or some form of communication between the two individuals. There is empathy between the two.

The highest aspect of love is an admiring or reverential love. This love is born out of and motivated by respect. It's motivated by admiration and a heartfelt appreciation. It matters not if the one loving is a higher or a lower in class or in stature, subservient to or in command of or the master of the one being loved. We can see that this is manifested in agape love.

We said earlier that agape Love is a disinterested love, but that does not mean there is no respect for the object of that love. God first manifested agape love toward man in the provision of his plan, even though the race was his own creation and they were much lower in nature. He had a due respect and an admiration for that perfect race born in Adam. If he did not, he would have not allowed nor continued the direct communication that Adam enjoyed with the Father. Paul in Romans 5 expounds on agape love that was shown by the Heavenly Father.

Yeah, didn't mean.

Go back to that.

There's two scriptures which talk about when considering the love of God, one issue always needs to be considered with it, and that issue is justice. These two must be considered in relation to the other. Does justice override or supersede love? Or is it subservient to love, which takes precedent when they seemingly dictate opposite or at least differing actions? We have two scriptures again that seem to need reconciling in the light of each other.

And the first is.

Ah, there we go. The first is first John, and there's actually two scriptures. You know, the first, the fourth book of First John is a love chapter, much like Paul's dissertation on it in Corinthians. But verse 8 says, the one who does not love God, who does not love, does not know God, for God is love.

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And along with that, verse 16 says, and we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

The first John Scriptures define precisely the need of not just having a measure of love within our character, but it must truly be an intimate driving force within us. God, the most powerful and omnipotent being in the universe, is motivated and guided by his love, and especially for his creation. So do these contradict each other when it comes down to being both just and loving? Which does God choose? The first John Scriptures define precisely the need of not just having a measure of love within our character, but but it must be truly a, like we said before, a powerful force within us.

Psalms 89 14. Righteousness and justice are the foundations of thy throne. Loving kindness and truth go before thee.

So do these really conflict each other when it comes down to being both just and loving? Which does God choose? If righteousness and justice are his throne's foundation, how do we understand the importance, operation and precedence of love and truth? The first John Scriptures defied not just the need of having a got a duplication of text here. Okay.

Can a God who proclaims to be love personified be so intolerant of what was and might be a simple mistake in the overall view of the consequences of the cancer of sin and evil born amongst the simple act in the Garden of Eden? We can easily answer yes to that question. Love is not context specific, but must be viewed in the larger picture, both in terms of the individual and in the terms of others affected by him. Yes, justice in this case is loving consideration for all others in God's creation.

Sin in any case does not exist in a void. It negatively affects others. Besides, the sinner was not the initial sin of Eve at least a contributing factor in Adam's decision to follow her into sin? We mentioned that this is true not only of man, but for all of God's creatures, including the spiritual realm. The first body of creation after our Lord in the person of the Logos was the angelic hosts, and most handsome among these was Lucifer, meaning star of the morning dawn.

God's love and justice required the same of him as well. His just sentence of destruction for Satan has been delayed for the experience and ultimate blessing of the world, but it will be carried out nonetheless.

The question is then raised, does God love Satan? As a side issue, is God's love so great that it can rise above the vilest and most evil behavior as manifested in in Satan? Universalists would say yes. We would answer no. It would be incorrect to say that God loves Satan.

God loves all of the faithful of the angelic hosts, and God did love Lucifer before he aspired to be like the Most High, losing his love and appreciation for the Father. The object of love has to have some redeeming quality worthy of love, and as a result of his evil and selfish course, Satan now lacks any qualities along this line. He aspires only for his own glory and continued existence and the thwarting of the divine plan. He is uncaring of the evil and havoc he reaps upon the world of mankind.

There is in Satan ultimately no characteristics worthy of pity, much less of the love of the father. In reprint 5,287 brother Russell also expresses this view, but is ever mindful of the effect of the new mind on slandering another, even if that other is Satan, and so he adds to that discussion in reprint

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5267 it is not our part to slander him. He is God's enemy, and God is able to attend to that case much better than we.

We read that even Michael would not bring a railing accusation against him, but said But Michael the Archangel, when disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, the Lord will rebuke you as stated in Jude 1:9 New American Standard so even the Archangel left the judgment of Satan to the Father rather than rail against him. Well, if God can't love Satan because of his evil, can he possibly love the world now in its current condition?

There certainly are scriptures that indicate there are conditions in the human being he is incapable of entirely overlooking. Proverbs 16:5 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Assuredly he will not be unpunished. Amos 5:14 15 Seek ye good and not evil, that you may live and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, just as you have said, hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate, and perhaps the Lord of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

God cannot love evil or those willfully consumed by it. But God can choose to look upon the heart and love based on the intention and the desire to be pleasing rather than imperfect human failings. Brother Russell remarks in reprint 1253 that God can at the present love the race, but only in a sympathetic manner. A truly admiring type of love is only possible through the standing one gets, through the robe of Christ's righteousness, the desires of his heart, or through the restorative process of the kingdom. Regeneration of the Race.

We have seen that love never supersedes justice, always working in harmony with it. But looking at it from the other's perspective, does justice limit love? The answer to that appears to be more yes than no. In that vein, we would say that justice limits love, such that love can never be exercised in a manner that would result in an unjust situation. God, being constrained by his own attribute of justice, will not forgive the death sentence received by mankind without just redemption, even though this may seem like a loving thing to do.

But we must also realize that what is just has limited bounds. There are many situations which require the bounds of justice up to a point when justice is met, love and mercy are free to go beyond it. Let's look into man's failure in the garden and the resulting sentence. Ransom, resurrection, and sin offering the creation of man was born out of love. God's trial and sentence of the race was clearly just.

The price of man's redemption was just as well. But justice neither demands nor excludes the provision of ransom and sin offering. Justice only goes as far as the sentence and the price of redemption. Without the provision of a plan of redemption, the race would ultimately die out or destroy itself. That, as bleak as it sound, would be just period.

Love provides the redeemer and his sacrificial offering for sin. Love provides as part of this arrangement an opportunity for the attainment of a heavenly reward. As the consequence of Jesus provision of the ransom and sin offering, God would be 100% just in offering merely everlasting life on the earth or return to the spiritual realm for Jesus as the Archangel, that would be just. The offer of the divine nature in return was not in any way required of justice. So we see a general principle on the way justice and love interact.

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Justice sets up the requirements which must be met, but there are usually characteristics and actions which go beyond these requirements, which are completely at the discretion of love and mercy.

We have been discussing God's plan in relation to his attribute of love, but from now on we want to focus more in particular on the grandness and depth of love God and Jesus have shown the entire race. Let us start with Jesus and His love. To get a better appreciation of what he has done because of his love, we should take some time to better appreciate his position with the Father. Let us start at the very beginning, the very beginning of time John 1:1 through verse 4 we'll be reading from the New American Standard with a little insertion of the prepositions that really should be there. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and the Word was a God, and he was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being by him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being. In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and by the way, that's what my tie says you can come up and present from one of the brethren.

In these four short verses we get a perspective on the position which our Lord in his pre human existence as the Word or Logos, had with the Father. He was the only direct creation of God. Even the universe around us did not exist. There were only two the Father and His Begotten Son. There has been and never will again be a greater position than that of the firstborn of all things.

The Logos was now to become a creator as he carried out the Heavenly Father's orders and designs in the creation of the angelic hosts, the universe in general, and specifically the preparation of earth as a habitable place for mankind, and then was given the commandment of God. Genesis 1:26 Let us make man in Our image, as he said, those to the Logos according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, over the cattle, and over all the earth and every creeping.

Imagine this race that has just been initiated on the earth. With this, the grand privilege undoubtedly came a commitment on our Lord's part. A commitment motivated not by duty, but by love. God, knowing the end from the beginning, at some time prior to the creation of man, had to inform our Lord of the inevitable fall of this race and their need, ultimate need of redemption. Who then was qualified?

And who in the heavenly realm possessed the ability to to endure the sacrificial death faithfully? Any faithful and obedient angel had the basic qualification, a perfect life untainted by the sin of the world, and like our Lord, it was a spiritual life. But it could be transformed into a human life for the sacrifice. But the more intriguing part of the question was whether or not any of the angelic hosts had the love and the desire to endure the experiences that would be required of a sympathetic high priest.

Our general consensus was that only Jesus had the ability as well as the qualifications for the task. What Jesus had was the love for the human race that he took part in the direct creation of Adam. The rest of the angelic race undoubtedly had deep seated affection for that race. But Jesus as its direct Creator, was in essence a parent to the race, and as any parent would do, he was ready to provide their life for its every need, including the sacrifice of his life, if that is what his children required of Him.

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He was directly responsible for our creation and would ultimately be responsible for our redemption and our eternal life.

He surely knew that the atrocities and depravities of a sinful human race would be responsible for what they would be responsible for. Put yourself, though in that position. Think of all the evil man has generated over the last 6,000 years. Now look at it from this perspective. If you knew your children would get themselves into a similar amount of trouble and you knew what a what sacrifice it would take to rescue them from the trouble and get them back to that innocent state that they were at their birth.

Knowing that fact, would you think twice about becoming a parent in the first place? Would you think not the whole thing was just not worth it. Jesus knew the sinful destiny of man, and yet we have no record nor any reason to believe that he would have hesitated or even considered the possibility of not carrying out the Father's will in this matter. He was consumed with being pleasing and loving of his Father love was not required to make the provision for man's redemption. It was purely of grace.

The sentence was just. But this manner of provision, God's only Son, is an act of sacrificing sacrificial love on both of their parts.

In reprint 5643 the article ends with a short verse and two of the lines in it were so appropriate as to what we aspire to and what our Lord did for the love of mankind. Love is not blind, but looks abroad through other eyes and asks not must I give, but may I sacrifice?

When we began, we contrasted the general and specifically God's love versus Justice. But given that love can and usually goes beyond what is required of justice, we will now examine the depth and breadth of God's love for the natural man. Evidences of God's love may be difficult or nearly impossible to discern. Mankind, corrupted by 6,000 years of sin and evil, has developed selfishness to an all time record. Until tomorrow we which will set another record.

If there is one thing we can anticipate going forward is that until the kingdom is established, man's selfishness will continue to increase.

Given this, is it any wonder that natural man cannot discern the evidences of love of God? The love of God he views all things from the perspective of what's in it for me. Selfish love can rarely see and appreciate the offerings and blessings of unselfish love. God's love is shown most clearly in what he has done, and what he has done can most universally be summed up in a single word.

And that word is Jesus. God comments on the Love John comments on the love of God in the fourth chapter of the again of the first first John and we'll read verses nine and ten. Now by this law by by this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we may live through Him.

In this is love not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins. Not only was it difficult for man to perceive the love of God in general, especially before the first advent, it was difficult for the house of servants natural Israel, to perceive the love of God. The nation had been in and out of captivity, blessed with good kings and suffering under evil ones. They had seen the promise of a Messiah go unfilled for 4,000 years. It was natural for them to think, where is the love of God?

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And as John tells us, it was manifested by the provision of Jesus it had been there all along, but it was hid to some degree in the prophecies of the Old Testament to this point in that in time There had not been a significant manifestation of God's love for man in general before Jesus sacrifice. Brother Russell says the Question Book in the Question book near the bottom of page 564 and I'll paraphrase a little bit, that although the angels witnessed some manifestations, manifestations of God's justice and mercy up until the first day event Advent, even they had not witnessed such a significant act of love by God on behalf of the world.

Even up to today. Such a supreme act of love is only seen by a relatively small proportion of mankind. Those who have an appreciation for the sacrifice of our Lord are that small group. The appreciation of this manifestation of God's love will go unappreciated by the vast majority of the race until the mediatorial phase of the kingdom. In verse 10, John points out that our love of God is not the point.

God provided His Son for our redemption not when we were worthy of covenanting with him, but when we were our sinners, unjustified, unappreciative of the magnitude of the gift.

Continuing along the line of God's love, let us turn to Romans the fifth chapter and pick up Paul's thoughts on the subject. We'll read verses 5 through 10 and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us in this year. In verse five, Paul brings out the importance of spirit begettal in the recognition of the love of God. If we have not fully comprehended what Christ's sacrifice does for us, then we are unable to rightly appreciate the love of God in providing it.

Verse 6 For while we were still helpless at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

In verses 6 and 7, Paul emphasizes the love encompassed in the provision of that perfect in the love encompassing the provision of the perfect man, man for a race of sinners, while they were yet unappreciative of that condition. For one would hardly die for a righteous man, though perhaps for the good of man someone would dare to even die. Paul in verse seven, speaking from the position of the natural man, says basically no one in their right mind would die for the righteous man, and maybe for a good man, one who does go beyond righteousness, would one perhaps consider laying down their own life?

Verse 8 but God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, and we kind of commented on that Scripture before. Much more then having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him, and in verse 10, for if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. In light of this, he goes on in verse 8 to further reiterate that God in essence did just that.

While no humans were in a position to even realize the great sacrifice that God provided in our Lord, the gift of love was given unconditionally. A gift motivated by grace, love and mercy, and it goes even further. The love of God is not content with merely the provision of the Savior, the arrangement that if anybody shall hear and believe, he shall be blessed. But this love of God to go still further, namely, that he who thus redeemed the race shall become king of the earth, and his scepter, his rule shall be from sea to sea, from river to the ends of the earth, until every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess to the glory of God.

And the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth, as the waters cover the deep.

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Have you ever put yourself in God's shoes? Tried to look at it from his perspective, and not from the perspective of the one redeeming grace and love, not as the supreme being of the universe, but as a father. Providing a son, your only son, for a sacrifice may be difficult to consider from the perspective of God. But we do have another experience that typifies what God did, and that is, I'm sure you recall the story of Abraham and Isaac.

We won't take the time to go over all the details of that experience. You're familiar with them and the account is given in Genesis 22. Isaac was Abraham's only son by Sarah. Due to the advanced age at which she bore him, it was probably certain that no other children would or could ever come again and be born of her. How similar to God's relationship to Jesus.

He too was the only son God could ever have. No other firstborn sons. God knew that no other human could take his place in providing the ransom and the sin offering for mankind, and make no mistake about it, what Jesus undertook was putting his life, his eternal existence, at risk. God knew that it was not an impossible task that laid before him.

It was one in which God knew he was capable of completing successfully. But there was no guarantee. Had this, had his successful fulfillment of his covenant been assured, there would not have been any real test involved, and God might have just as well said instead of that and unconditionally just forgiven mankind and given Jesus the divine nature and not bothered with the whole three and a half year experience here on the earth.

Abraham was in a similar position.

It was by no means guaranteed in his mind that Isaac would survive this sacrifice of his life on that altar.

If he would have been convinced prior to the experience that Isaac would somehow live through it, there would have been no point to the experience. Abraham had this conflict in his mind. If I kill him, does he get resurrected? We've never seen resurrection. It's not explicitly promised in the scriptures, although only be implied.

You know, not all of us may be parents, but all of us are children of parents and likely very good parents. So think about your parents. If there were a situation in your life where your life was in jeopardy and would not your parents willingly and gladly given their own life in your place? The offering of the life of one's own child is literally inconceivable to almost any parent, and yet that is what God and Abraham did have to face.

Trinitarians think that God was offering himself in an ultimate act of love. But any parent would rather die themselves than to see their children die. The common feeling among parents is that a parent should never have to bury any of their children. The children bury the parents. The witnessing of the death of one's child is a significant grief situation.

But the offering of one's only child is far a greater love, a sacrificial love beyond which there is no other.

Put yourself in the stead of Abraham. He was to offer Isaac, and he was to offer him merely to prove his loyalty to God. At least that was his perception. It may not have seemed to be a worthy cause for which Isaac would die. If he did slay Isaac, what good would it do?

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Abraham would be proved loyal to the father. But Abraham had no assurance from God that Isaac would be resurrected or that God would stay his hand as he ultimately did. He had more than little reason to believe that he would ever enjoy fellowship with Isaac again, and now put yourself in God's place, offering your son for the redemption of an evil, sinful and even vile race. The race for which he will suffer and experience death for would be the.

For the most part, not even he would be for the people that weren't even seeking him, seeking to know him. Oh, there are a few in the race that are loyal to you, but for the most part they're not even aware of your name, your character, or even your existence. This is mankind's perspective of God, and even if they were, it is likely they would be still indifferent to you. As we have said before, there was a real possibility of failure.

There was that possibility of failure, and the outcome was not guaranteed.

And if Jesus failed, there could be no fellowship with His Son again. Could you in God's position, do it? Do you have it within your being and capability to love that much? I think the universal answer to these questions are no, we don't have that ability, but we're not God. But putting ourselves in a position as the one offering our child, we can better appreciate God's love in even taking the chance on providing his only Son as our ransom sacrifice.

Could there be any grander manifestation of love in the universe at any time, even in the future? We think not.

Our finite natural minds may not be fully able to appreciate the boundless love that provided his sacrifice, but we should consider it in our development.

Are we developing love along similar lines? Love that seeks to encourage and build up the brethren? Love that seeks service no matter what the cost. Love that is devoid of selfishness. Love that seeks not to glorify self, but the Father and the Son, Paul and Judah, minus us to keep ourselves in the love of God, there is truly no greater love.

I would just leave you with the two very similar, very familiar scriptures that best impress on our minds divine love. Ironically, both penned by John and both with the same chapter and verse but in two separate books.

The first in the Gospel of John 3:16. It's so familiar, I feel. Not exactly. I don't need to quote it, but we will. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life.

In the same chapter and verse from John's first Epistle, we know love by this that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, and may the Lord bless you as you consider the grandest manifestation of his love that ever was or ever will be. I can think of no greater motivation for us to strive to use the rest of our lives to be as pleasing as possible to him. May the Lord bless you in that pursuit.