

For God so Loved the World . . . OK, So What?

By Daryl Wingerd

If you are a true believer in Christ, you should enjoy the peaceful assurance that when Christ returns you will not perish in God's fiery judgment of unbelievers. But true faith is grounded on facts, so for your confidence to be unshakable, you need to be convinced of the truth upon which it rests. In other words, you must be able to correctly and confidently answer the question, "*Why* will I not perish?"

One reason believers will not perish, of course, is that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for their sins (Rom. 5:8-10). Another reason is that they believe in Christ—all who believe in Him will be saved (John 6:40). These are good and true answers, but foundational to both is the simple phrase, "For God so loved the world." These six words are the beginning of one of the most familiar verses in the Bible: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).



Three factors are mentioned in John 3:16: 1) The love of God, 2) the sending of Christ to die, and 3) the faith of believers. All three are equally necessary for a person to be saved, but notice that they are assigned a sequence of priority in the structure of the sentence. God's love comes first, revealing His motivation for sending His Son to die. Then, as the result of Christ's death, those who believe will be saved.

The point is that while the death of Christ and the faith of believers are causes of salvation at one level, they are *secondary* causes, dependent upon a *first* cause—God's love for sinners. Just as a tall building is dependent in a secondary sense on its foundation, but ultimately on the bedrock upon which the foundation rests, your faith is dependent in a secondary sense on the death of Christ, but ultimately on the theological bedrock of God's love.

When speaking of the cause (or one might say, causes) of our salvation, theologian/pastor John Calvin concluded that "the secret love with which the Heavenly Father loved us in Himself is higher than all other causes."¹ Calvin was right. This is the consistent testimony of Scripture. Consider the following biblical evidence that God's *love* for sinners is the foundational cause of the *salvation* of sinners.

- God *demonstrates His own love toward us*, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)
- *In love* He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:4-6)
- But God, being rich in mercy, *because of His great love with which He loved us*, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. (Eph. 2:4-5)
- But when the kindness of God our Savior *and His love for mankind* appeared, He saved us . . . (Titus 3:4-5)
- See *how great a love* the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God. (1 John 3:1)

Paul writes, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). But when we ask *why* there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, we find that it is ultimately because nothing in all of creation "will be able to separate us from *the love of God*, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38-39).

A summary of the above biblical evidence may be stated in two points:

1. *Redemptive action is motivated by redemptive love.*
2. *Redemptive benefits are the result of redemptive love.*

These two points lead us to conclude that *the assurance of salvation* must be grounded in *the assurance of redemptive love*. When you ask yourself the question (and it should be asked), "Why will I not perish?" there is only one answer that your soul will find completely satisfying: *You will not perish because God loves you!* Quoting John Calvin once again,

Our minds cannot find calm repose, *until we arrive at the unmerited love of God*. As the whole matter of our salvation must not be sought anywhere else than in Christ, so we must see whence Christ came to us, and why He was offered to be our Savior.²

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¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. XVII (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 124.

² *Ibid.*, 122-123.