

## The Greatest Gift

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It's the time of year that people are thinking about gifts. Gifts to give to friends and family. Gifts they'd like to receive from friends and family. But there is one gift that is greater than all others. It's the gift of eternal life that God has given us through His only begotten Son. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

But we don't have to accept the gift. We have a choice to make. These choices are perhaps best summarized by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:15 as "life" and "death" or "good" and "evil." On the surface, the decision seems rather simple. Who would *choose* to die? But that's where the devil makes his living. In the garden of Eden, he convinced Eve that the forbidden fruit was "good" and "desirable" – the same fruit that God said would surely bring death (Genesis 3:6). Every generation of man since has been tempted to turn away from the better part and choose that which leads to a bitter end. Just because we have free will doesn't mean we always pick freedom.

To choose "life" or "good" is to choose to love. We often use the word "love" to describe a feeling that you are swept into or fall out of. But true love is much more than that; it is something you decide to do. After Moses set life and death before the children of Israel, he charged them to *"love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it"* (Deut. 30:16). In other words, by choosing life, they were choosing to love. They were even commanded to do so.

Love remains our connection to the Creator. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). God's love was not a response or a reaction. He started the process. He took the risk of rejection knowing that He would not receive an immediate "I love you, too" in return. But He chose to extend Himself anyway. He is love (1 John 4:8). And we learn to love by examining that love which He has for us.

What makes choosing God's love one of the best decisions you could ever make?

**God's love encompasses.** *"For God so loved the world"* That's the scope of His love. He did not choose a certain part of the world or a specific nation to love. His affection is universal. His desire is for *"all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:4). His wish is for "all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). There is no one outside of the range of God's love. He created everyone. He knows everyone. He loves everyone. That includes you.

Shouldn't we then, as recipients of this love, practice it in the same way? Yet, instead of choosing to love our fellow man, we sometimes try to choose who we think is worthy of our love. We certainly didn't learn that from our Father. He loved the world. Who in your world doesn't fit in that category?

**God's love gives.** He so loved the world *“that He gave His only begotten Son.”* He did not feel a certain way toward mankind and hide it in His heart. He expressed it. He demonstrated it (Rom. 5:8). His love involves motion, not just emotion. It is active. And the action by which He made it known was not by giving *one* of His sons, but according to the Greek “the Son the only begotten.” By not withholding the greatest gift of all, He left no doubt of His love.

When we choose to love God in return, we must do so with the proper appreciation of how much He loved us first. While we can certainly never match His gift, we can give the very best we have to offer. Instead of trying to do the bare minimum to get by, we ought to devote our whole heart to the task. Rather than bemoaning the sacrifices we have to make for the cause, we should imagine how He felt as He watched His Son die for the people He loved. How much do you love Him?

**God's love accomplishes.** His love for the world motivated Him to give His only begotten Son *“that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* The purpose of our Father's love is fulfilled in the salvation of souls. Souls that were “helpless,” “sinners,” and “enemies” (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10) can choose eternal life when they respond in faithful obedience to God's great gift. His love never fails.

When we love the things of the world, we set our affection on that which is passing away (1 John 2:17). But when we choose God's love, we lay hold of eternal life with the Father and His son. It's what God wanted from the beginning. Can you think of a greater accomplishment?

The same decision remains set before us: life and death. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23). It's that simple. Make your choice.