

Divine Love

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While divine love can be called perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it cannot correctly be characterized as unconditional.

In today's world trembling with terror and hatred, our knowledge of divine love is of utmost importance. We bear responsibility to understand and testify that Heavenly Father and Jesus the Christ are glorified, living, and loving personages. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."¹ Jesus "so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God."² Indeed, the Father and the Son are one—in purpose and love.³

Divine Love Is Perfect and Infinite

Their love is divine by definition. Scriptures also describe it as perfect.⁴ It is infinite because the Atonement was an act of love for all who ever lived, who now live, and who will ever live.⁵ It is also infinite because it transcends time.

Divine Love Is Enduring

Divine love is enduring:⁶ "The Lord ... keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."⁷

Divine Love Is Universal

Divine love is universal.⁸ God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."⁹ Jesus is the light of the world,¹⁰ giving life and law to all things.¹¹ "He inviteth ... all to come unto him ... ; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female."¹² And all are invited to pray unto our Father in Heaven.¹³

Divine Love Is Also Conditional

While divine love can be called perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it

cannot correctly be characterized as *unconditional*. The word does not appear in the scriptures. On the other hand, many verses affirm that the higher levels of love the Father and the Son feel for each of us—and certain divine blessings stemming from that love—are *conditional*. Before citing examples, it is well to recognize various forms of conditional expression in the scriptures.

Conditional Forms

Several forms of conditional expression may be found in the scriptures:

- • “*If ... [certain conditions exist], then ... [certain consequences follow].*” (The indicators if and then may be written or implied.)
- • “*Inasmuch as ... [certain conditions exist], ... [certain consequences follow].*”¹⁴
- • “*Except ... cannot ...*”¹⁵
- • “*Prove ... , if ...*” For example, a verse pertaining to our creation reveals a prime purpose for our sojourn here in mortality: “We will *prove* them herewith, to see *if* they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”¹⁶ Life here is a period of mortal probation. Our thoughts and actions determine whether our mortal probation can merit heavenly approbation.¹⁷

The Conditional Nature of Divine Love

With scriptural patterns of conditional statements in mind, we note many verses that declare the conditional nature of divine love for us. Examples include:

- • “*If ye keep my commandments, [then] ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.*”¹⁸
- • “*If you keep not my commandments, [then] the love of the Father shall not continue with you.*”¹⁹
- • “*If a man love me, [then] he will keep my words: and my Father will love him.*”²⁰
- • “*I love them that love me; and those that seek me ... shall find me.*”²¹
- • “*God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*”²²
- • The Lord “*loveth those who will have him to be their God.*”²³
- • “*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*”²⁴

The Conditional Nature of Divine Blessings

It is equally evident that certain blessings come from a loving Lord only *if* required conditions are met. Examples include:

- • “If thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, ... *then* I will lengthen thy days.”²⁵
- • “If thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments ... ; *then* will I perform my word with thee.”²⁶
- • “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”²⁷
- • “When we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”²⁸
- • “Unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.”²⁹

The Lord declares: “All who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof. ...

“And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.

“... The conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed ... of him who is anointed, ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead.”³⁰

Other laws are designed to bless us here in mortality. One such law is tithing: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... and *prove* me now herewith, saith the Lord ... , *if* I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”³¹ Such a blessing is *conditional*. Those who fail to tithe have no promise.³²

Again, “all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised ... that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, *if* ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you.”³³

Why is divine love conditional? Because God loves us and wants us to be happy. “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, *if* we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue,

uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”

34

Our Defense against False Ideologies

Understanding that divine love and blessings are not truly “unconditional” can defend us against common fallacies such as these: “Since God’s love is unconditional, He will love me regardless ...”; or “Since ‘God is love,’³⁵ He will love me unconditionally, regardless ...”

These arguments are used by anti-Christ to woo people with deception. Nehor, for example, promoted himself by teaching falsehoods: He “testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, ... for the Lord had created all men, ... and, in the end, *all men should have eternal life.*”³⁶ Sadly, some of the people believed Nehor’s fallacious and unconditional concepts.

In contrast to Nehor’s teachings, divine love warns us that “wickedness never was happiness.”³⁷ Jesus explains, “Come unto me and be ye saved; ... *except* ye shall keep my commandments, ... ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”³⁸

Divine Love and the Sinner

Does this mean the Lord does not love the sinner? Of course not. Divine love is infinite and universal. The Savior loves both saints and sinners. The Apostle John affirmed, “We love him, because he first loved us.”³⁹ And Nephi, upon seeing in vision the Lord’s mortal ministry, declared: “The world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his *loving kindness* and his long-suffering towards the children of men.”⁴⁰ We know the expansiveness of the Redeemer’s love because He died that *all* who die might live again.⁴¹

Immortality and Eternal Life

God declared that His work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”⁴² Thanks to the Atonement, the gift of immortality is *unconditional*.⁴³ The greater gift of eternal life, however, is *conditional*.⁴⁴ In order to qualify, one must deny oneself of ungodliness⁴⁵ and honor the ordinances and covenants of the temple.⁴⁶ The resplendent bouquet of God’s love—including eternal life—includes blessings for which we must qualify, not entitlements to be expected unworthily. Sinners cannot bend His will to theirs and require Him to bless them in sin.⁴⁷ If they desire to enjoy every bloom in His beautiful bouquet, they must repent.⁴⁸

Counsel to Repent

President Brigham Young (1801–77) declared: “Every blessing the Lord proffers to his people is on conditions. These conditions are: ‘Obey my law, keep my commandments, walk in my ordinances, observe my statutes, love mercy, ... keep yourselves pure in the law, and then you are entitled to these blessings, and not until then.’”⁴⁹

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) expressed a similar thought: “This is how I look at the requirements which God has made upon his people collectively and individually, and I do believe that I have no claim upon God or upon my brethren for blessing, favor, confidence or love, unless, by my works, I prove that I am worthy thereof, and I never expect to receive blessings that I do not merit.”⁵⁰

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said that the Lord “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.” (D&C 1:31.) ... We will better appreciate his love ... if similar abhorrence for sin impels us to transform our lives through repentance.”⁵¹

Given the imperfections we all have, individual initiative is imperative: “He that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven;

“And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord.”⁵²

In climbing the pathway of repentance, both the effort and the result count. The Lord taught that spiritual gifts are given to “those who love me and keep all my commandments, and [who] *seeketh so to do.*”⁵³

Divine Love Provides Us with a Pattern

Jesus asked us to love one another as He has loved us.⁵⁴ Is that possible? Can our love for others really approach divine love? Yes it can!⁵⁵ The pure love of Christ is granted to all who seek and qualify for it.⁵⁶ Such love includes service⁵⁷ and requires obedience.⁵⁸

Compliance with divine law requires faith—the pivotal point of mortality’s testing and trials. At the same time, faith proves our love for God.⁵⁹ The more committed we become to patterning our lives after His, the purer and more divine our love becomes.⁶⁰

Perhaps no love in mortality approaches the divine more than the love parents have for their children. As parents, we have the same obligation to teach obedience that our heavenly parents felt obliged to teach us. While we can teach the need for tolerance of others’ differences,⁶¹ we cannot tolerate their infractions of the laws of God. Our children are to be taught the doctrines of the kingdom,⁶² to trust in the Lord, and to know that they receive the blessings of

His love by first obeying His commandments.⁶³

Divine love is perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal. The full flower of divine love and our greatest blessings from that love are conditional—predicated upon our obedience to eternal law. I pray that we may qualify for those blessings and rejoice forever.

What Does *Conditional* Mean?

The term *conditional* comes from Latin roots—*con*, meaning “with,” and *dicere*, meaning “to talk.” Thus, *conditional* means that “bounds or conditions have been communicated verbally.”

The term *unconditional* means “without condition or limitation; absolute.”

[illustration] *Fishers of Men*, by Simon Dewey, courtesy of Altus Fine Art, American Fork, Utah

[illustration] *The Last Judgment*, by John Scott

[photo] Photograph by Steve Bunderson, posed by models

Notes

1. John 3:16.
2. D&C 34:3.
3. See 2 Ne. 31:21; Alma 12:33; D&C 93:3.
4. See 1 Jn. 4:12, 15–18.
5. See Alma 34:9–12. Divine love is infinite also because all the faithful may be eventually “encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love” (Alma 26:15).
6. See Isa. 54:10; see also 3 Ne. 22:10.
7. Deut. 7:9; see also 1 Chr. 16:15; Ps. 105:8.
8. Defined as “of, relating to, extending to, or affecting the entire world or all within the world; worldwide” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. [2000], “universal,” 1883).
9. Matt. 5:45; see also 3 Ne. 12:45.
10. See John 8:12; John 9:5.
11. See D&C 88:6–13.
12. 2 Ne. 26:33.
13. See Matt. 6:6; see also 3 Ne. 13:6; Moro. 7:48.

14. For examples, see 1 Ne. 2:20; 1 Ne. 4:14; 2 Ne. 1:9, 20; 2 Ne. 4:4; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Alma 9:13; Alma 36:1, 30; Alma 38:1; Alma 50:20; Hel. 4:15.

15. Examples are: “*Except* a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he *cannot* enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5; emphasis added), and “*Except* ye abide my law ye *cannot* attain to this glory” (D&C 132:21; emphasis added). See also Ether 12:34; D&C 25:15; D&C 132:21.

16. Abr. 3:25; emphasis added; see also Mal. 3:10; 3 Ne. 24:10.

17. See Matt. 25:21, 23.

18. John 15:10; emphasis added.

19. D&C 95:12; emphasis added.

20. John 14:23; emphasis added.

21. Prov. 8:17.

22. Acts 10:34–35.

23. 1 Ne. 17:40.

24. John 14:21.

25. 1 Kgs. 3:14; emphasis added; see also Deut. 19:9.

26. 1 Kgs. 6:12; emphasis added.

27. D&C 82:10.

28. D&C 130:21.

29. D&C 88:38; see also D&C 132:5.

30. D&C 132:5–7; see also Alma 9:12; Alma 42:13, 17.

31. Mal. 3:10; emphasis added; see also 3 Ne. 24:10. The Lord did not restrict *how* He would bless tithe payers. Some are blessed spiritually more than they are temporally.

32. See D&C 119:4–5. Tithing is also required for one to be enrolled with the people of God (see D&C 85:3).

33. Mosiah 2:22; emphasis added. That conditional counsel is repeated many times throughout the scriptures. See 1 Ne. 2:20; 1 Ne. 4:14; 2 Ne. 1:9, 20; 2 Ne. 4:4; Jacob 2:17–19; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7; Mosiah 2:31; Alma 9:13; Alma 36:1, 30; Alma 37:13; Alma 38:1; Alma 48:15, 25; Alma 50:20; Hel. 3:20.

34. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 255–56; emphasis added.

35. 1 Jn. 4:8, 16.

36. Alma 1:4; emphasis added; see also Alma 1:3, 5–6; 2 Ne. 28:8–9. Such an unconditional concept (eternal life for all) would negate the need for ordinances, covenants, and temple work.
37. Alma 41:10.
38. 3 Ne. 12:20; emphasis added.
39. 1 Jn. 4:19.
40. 1 Ne. 19:9; emphasis added.
41. See Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; see also 1 Cor. 15:22.
42. Moses 1:39.
43. See Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:22; Alma 12:8; D&C 76:17; Joseph Smith Translation, John 5:29.
44. See D&C 14:7.
45. See Moro. 10:32; Joseph Smith Translation, Matt. 16:26.
46. See D&C 132:19.
47. See Alma 11:37.
48. The Lord said, “Thou art not excusable in thy transgressions; ... go thy way and sin no more” (D&C 24:2). See also John 8:11; D&C 6:35; D&C 29:3; D&C 82:7; D&C 97:27.
49. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 454.
50. *Deseret News*, 12 Nov. 1873, 644.
51. *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 59.
52. D&C 1:32–33.
53. D&C 46:9; emphasis added.
54. See John 13:34; John 15:12.
55. See Ether 12:33–34; Moro. 7:46–47.
56. See Moro. 7:48.
57. See Gal. 5:13; Mosiah 2:18–21; Mosiah 4:15.
58. John taught, “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected” (1 Jn. 2:5).
59. See Deut. 13:3; John 14:15; John 15:6–7.
60. See Matt. 6:19–22; D&C 88:67–68; D&C 93:11–20.

61. See A of F 1:11.

62. Doctrines include the plan of salvation, faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Moro. 8:10; D&C 68:25; Moses 6:57–62).

63. See Mosiah 4:6–7.

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