

## THE LOVE OF GOD

John 3:16-21

Intro: What's the difference between the God of the Old Testament---and the God of the New Testament?

- Before you answer that---let me warn you---it's a trick question.
- There is no difference.
- Contrary to popular misunderstanding---the God of the Old Testament was not a God of fire and brimstone---and the God of the New Testament---a God of love.
- The God of the Old Testament is identical to the God of the New Testament.
- God and the Son of God are in fact one---Jesus said so. (John 10:30)
- And as Hebrews 13:8 tells us---“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.”
- There is no reason to doubt that Jesus was an active participant in all things God did during both testamental periods.
- When God said---“Let us make man in our image”---He was apparently talking to Jesus.
- Because Jesus was the One who then created us.
- In fact---Jesus was the Creator of everything.
- John has made that clear to us.

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 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.”
- The Word---Jesus---then came to earth.
- “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”
- And Jesus didn't come to earth to appease an angry God.
- He didn't come to make it possible for the God of the Old Testament to become a loving heavenly Father.
- Jesus is God.
- The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament.
- The Father---the Son---and the Holy Spirit---constitute one God.
- Father and Son are simply two aspects---two persons---of the same God.
- Now---it is true that the judgmental side of God's nature is clearly revealed in the Old Testament.
- And judgment does seem to be a predominate theme in the Old Testament.
- But we also find frightening pictures of judgment in the New Testament.
- The picture of Jesus coming back as King of Kings and Lords of Lords---as pictured in one of our stained-glass windows---is for many a very frightening picture of judgment.

- And the descriptions of hell that Jesus painted are very frightening---and graphic.
- By the same token---we also find beautiful pictures of God's love in the Old Testament.
- Francine Rivers captured an amazing portrait of God's love in the novel *Redeeming Love*---which is based on the Old Testament book of Hosea.
- Many of us read it together twenty years ago.
- Grace read it over the Christmas break---and loved it.
- And you can see it on the big screen in Springfield on January 20<sup>th</sup>.
- Jeremiah even quoted God---in the Old Testament---as saying ---“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”
- Never doubt the love of God---as revealed in either the Old or New Testaments.
- Because everything God has ever done has been ultimately motivated by love.
- Because God is love.
- Having said that---it is obvious that the New Testament does focus primarily on the love of God.
- And it reveals to us the ultimate expression of God's love---the cross of Christ.
- And John's gospel beautifully tells us of God's love in what's been called “everybody's favorite verse” ---John 3:16.

- Now---it may come as a surprise---but we don't know for sure who actually said the words found in John 3:16.
- We know Jesus began speaking in verse 10---because it says so---and most everyone believes He is still speaking through verse 15.
- But since there are no quotation marks in the Greek---we don't know at what point Jesus stopped talking---and John began commenting.
- Verses 16-21 are colored red---in red-letter Bibles---but many believe John is the one who spoke those words.
- And if you read them carefully---they do sound more like a comment---than a quote.
- But either way---it's a true statement.
- And it's where we begin our study today---on the love of God.
- And the most important thing we're going to learn about God's love is that we have the choice of either accepting it---or rejecting it.

## I. ACCEPTING HIS LOVE

John 3:16

- ““For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.””
- Notice who did the loving here.
- It's God the Father who so loved---not God the Son.

- That's not to say that the Son doesn't love---but it does emphasize the fact that it is the Father whose love is being pictured in John 3:16.
- And notice who it is that He loved.
- He loved the world.
- God's love was directed to the entire world.
- He didn't just love one people---or one nation.
- He loves the entire world---all mankind.
- And He didn't just talk about love.
- He did something about it---He gave.
- And His gift wasn't a token expression of His love---like a box of candy---or a bouquet of flowers.
- It was a full and complete expression of His love.
- He gave His Son---to die on our behalf.
- In previous studies we've explored why a death was necessary ---and we've seen why God had to pay the penalty for sin Himself.
- He was the only one who could pay it---without forfeiting eternal life to do so.
- But He paid it with His Son's life.
- Why? To demonstrate the full extent of His love.
- Which would you find easier---to give up your own life for those you love---or to give up the life of a son or daughter?
- For most of us---that's a no-brainer.
- Well---God gave Himself in a way that would dramatically impact us---at the core of our being.
- He gave Himself in a way that would remove any doubt as to the extent of His love.
- He gave Himself---through His only begotten Son.
- Through the one and only perfect physical manifestation---of a spiritual God who transcends physical limitations.
- He gave Himself---through His Son.
- And He gave His Son for the sake of whoever would believe in Him.
- In saying that---the focus now turns to us---and our response to the gift of God.
- It's not enough that God gave---we have to receive.
- And we do that through belief.
- But we have to understand what it means to believe.
- To believe is more than to give mental assent to something.
- To believe is to trust in---to lay a hold of---to act upon something.
- It's not enough to say---"I believe Jesus died for me."
- That belief must cause you to respond---to accept---to receive the gift offered.
- And to put it to its intended use.
- I've often used an illustration of a man dying of thirst in the desert to make this point.

- If someone is dying of thirst---and is found and offered water ---it does him no good---until he drinks it.
- It's not enough to express belief in the saving power of water.
- You have to drink it.
- And you have to drink it yourself.
- Someone else can't drink it for you.
- Belief in Christ must be expressed as an individual---conscious act---of accepting the Son of God.
- And that means everyone who is old enough to be held accountable for his or her sins---must personally accept the gift offered.
- Now---some do believe that since Christ died for everyone---everyone will eventually be saved.
- That all will be saved on the merits of Christ's death---even if they haven't heard about it---and therefore can't believe in it.
- That sounds wonderful---but it contradicts Scripture.
- The Bible makes it clear that we are saved by *faith* in Christ's atoning death.
- Not simply by the fact that He died.
- "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."
- In order to receive the gift of eternal life---everlasting life in the presence of---and in fellowship with God---we must believe what He did for us.

- And in order to believe it---we must know about it.
- Now---it is true that the first chapter of Romans makes it clear that everyone will be judged on the basis of what they know.
- And some see in that a hope that some will be saved without knowing about the death of Christ.
- But it also makes it clear that everyone does know enough about the nature of God to honor Him as God---to give thanks to Him---and to live in accordance to what they do understand to be right.
- But that no one does.
- That's why everyone needs a Savior.
- And that's why we must share the gospel---the good news that sin can be forgiven.
- But even then---in order for sin to be forgiven---the fact that God gave His only Son to make that possible---must be believed.
- To avoid being cut off from God forever because of our sin---from perishing---the gift offered through Christ must be accepted.
- And it is accepted by believing in the Son of God---and by acting upon that belief.
- To fail to do so amounts to...

## II. REJECTING HIS LOVE

John 3:17-21

- “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.
- ‘He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- ‘And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.
- ‘For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.
- ‘But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.’”
- God did not send His Son to judge the world---but to save it.
- That was His purpose in sending His Son.
- However---as one author noted---“It is not the purpose of the sun to cast shadows, but it inevitably does.”
- The same is true of God sending His Son---of expressing His love---and making salvation possible to us.
- He didn’t send His Son to judge us.
- But to reject His love---is to bring judgment upon ourselves.
- John---or Jesus---if He is speaking here---said---“he who believes in Him is not judged.”
- But---“he who does not believe has been judged already.”
- That tells us something very important about judgment.
- Judgment is not so much a future event---as it is a current process.

- We are being judged now---by what we do with God’s Son.
- There will be a formal sentencing in the future---but judgment is taking place now.
- That means you can know where you stand before God now.
- You don’t have to wait.
- You shouldn’t wait.
- You don’t have to go through life wondering if you’ll go to heaven.
- You can know now---because judgment is taking place now.
- And it has nothing to do with being good enough to go to heaven.
- It has to do with what you believe about the Son of God.
- The basis of judgment has been made clear in Scripture.
- “He who believes in Him is not judged.”
- In John 5:24 Jesus put it this way...
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”
- And according to our text here---the converse is also true.
- “He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
- We are being judged now---by the way we respond to the Son of God.
- And that shouldn’t surprise us.

- The way we respond to things of known value---always judges us.
- It's like the man who went to an art gallery of old masters.
- He came out and said---“Well, I don't think much of your old pictures.”
- To which the curator replied---“Sir, I would remind you that these pictures are no longer on trial, but those who look at them are.”
- We are judged by our response to things around us.
- Especially those of known value.
- Our opinion of Jesus doesn't judge Him.
- It judges us.
- We are on trial now---and are being judged by our response to the light of God.
- “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil.”
- Men who are evil hate the light.
- Why? Because they don't want their deeds to be exposed.
- They are like bugs scurrying for darkness when a log is rolled over.
- If your deeds are evil---you know it.
- You just don't want others to know it.
- So you stay out of the light.

- And you don't want to hear what God has to say about your behavior---because it confirms what you already know.
- That your deeds are evil.
- Those who practice the truth---however---are not afraid of the light.
- They know they aren't perfect---but they have nothing to hide.
- They are forgiven.
- And they want their good deeds shown as having come from the power and influence of God.
- They want their lives to reflect the love of God.
- So they move into the light at every opportunity.
- Hoping to reflect more and more of God's love---until it can be perfectly seen in them.
- That's how we are being judged today.
- We are judged by our day-to-day response to the light.
- Are you moving into the light---or out of it?
- You know how you are being judged---because you know which direction you are moving.
- And you know if the light of God's word makes you want to hide---or gives you great joy---and peace.
- The light of the world is Jesus.
- And if you'll accept it---the light is shining for you.
- Come to the light---and bask in the warmth of His love and forgiveness.