

John 3:16

John 3:14-18

14 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

16 “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.

17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

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 everlasting life.”

John 3:16, without a doubt, is the best-known passage in all of the Bible.

It is, undoubtedly, the most memorized and oft quoted passage in all of the Bible.

And, in all probability, it the most loved passage in all of the Bible.

But I’m afraid that many people do not give this passage the careful thought that it deserves, and the careful thought we need to give it.

- a. I’m afraid that many people are treating this passage in a superficial way and deriving a false comfort from it.
- b. The reality is: What John 3:16 says about God’s love is extremely challenging for us, when we consider it in context.
- c. And the faith it requires of us is far more challenging than most people realize.

So, I want you to consider what John 3:16 says about ...

- a. God’s love ... and what His love requires of us, and
- b. the faith that leads to eternal life

I want to begin by pointing out to you that ...

John 3:16 tells us of the *width* of God’s love.

It was the world that God so loved.

- a. It was not a nation ... it was not the good people ... it was not only the people who loved Him – it was the world!

God’s love is extended to all – He loves everyone.

- a. Jn 3:16 – “God so **loved the world**”
- b. 1Tim 4:10 “... we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.”
- c. Tit 2:11 – “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ...”
 - ▶ NASB: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ...”
- d. 2Pet 3:9 – “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The unlovable ... the unlovely ... the lonely who have no one else to love them ... the man who loves God and the man who never thinks of God ... the man who rests in the love of God and the

man who spurns God's love – ALL are included in this vast, inclusive love of God.

As Augustine put it: "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

John 3:16 tells of the *depth* of God's love.

In Eph 2:3 Paul speaks of the "great love with which He loved us".

- a. How great is His love for us? So great that He was willing to give His only begotten Son for us!
- b. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..."
 - ▶ It would be wonderful to know that God (the Creator, the Giver and Sustainer of life, the Lord of heaven and earth) loves us!
 - ▶ But it is beyond incredible, and beyond amazing, to know that God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us!!!

Rom 8:32 – "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

- a. NIV: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"
- b. The idea is: If God would give His own Son to die for us, then there is nothing that is good that He would not give us.

And the astounding fact is: God loves us with the love He has for His only begotten Son:

- a. Jn 17:23 – "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

John 3:16 tells of the *proof* of God's love.

God's love for us is a demonstrated, proven love.

- a. Jn 3:16 – "God so loved the world that He gave"
- b. Rom 5:8 – "But God **demonstrates** His own **love** toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- c. 1Jn 4:9-10 – "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

If we believe that God actually gave His Son to die for us ... then we cannot have any doubt that He loves us.

- a. The gift of His Son is proof beyond a shadow of doubt that He loves us.
- b. Such demonstration of His love is proof of His love – proof positive.

John 3:16 tells of the *nature* of God's love.

Love is so much a part of the nature of God that it can be said that "God is love".

- a. 1Jn 4:8 – "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."
- b. 1Jn 4:16 – "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

Love being the very nature of God, the very nature of love is seen in God; and we see that ...

- a. God's love is a SACRIFICIAL love
 - ▶ Jn 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that He gave (sacrificed) His only begotten Son, ..."

- ▶ Rev 1:5 – “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,”
 - ▶ Rom 5:6-8 – “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- b. God’s love is a SYMPATHIZING love
- ▶ Isa 63:7-9 – “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. 8 For He said, “Surely they are My people, Children who will not lie.” So He became their Savior. 9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old.”
 - ▶ Psa 103:10-14 – “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”
 - ▶ Heb 4:15 – “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”
- c. God’s love is a SATISFYING love (it satisfies the needs and longings of those whom He loves – the physical needs and the spiritual needs)
- ▶ Rom 8:32 – “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”
 - ∞ NIV: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”
 - ▶ Psa 103:3-5 – “Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”
 - ∞ Ac 14:17 – “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”
 - ∞ Matt 6: – “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”
 - ▶ Psa 107:8-9 – “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! 9 For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness.”
 - ∞ We need instruction ... we need correction ... we need forgiveness ... we need assurance ... we need hope ... we need to be comforted – and He satisfies all of our needs and the legitimate longings of our hearts.
 - ▶ Php 4:19 – ““And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

So, God’s love for us is a **sacrificial** love ... a **sympathizing** love ... a **satisfying** love.

But now, let me tell you why God’s love is as *challenging* to us as it is *comforting*.

We must love others the way God loves us.

1Jn 4:7-8 – “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

1Jn 4:11 – “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Jn 15:12 – “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Our love must be as *wide* as the world – our love must be extended to all, and to everyone.

- a. The unlovable ... the unlovely ... the unlikable ... the man who ignores us and the man who harms us... the one who is unloved by his own mother – ALL must come under the umbrella of our love.
 - ▶ We must love our brothers and sisters in the family of God.
 - ∞ 1Jn 4:21 – “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”
 - ▶ We must love our neighbors.
 - ∞ Matt 22:39 – “You shall **love your neighbor as yourself.**”
 - ▶ We must love our enemies.
 - ∞ Matt 5:43-46 ““You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 “But I say to you, **love your enemies**, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 “that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

Our love for one another must be a demonstrated, proven love

- a. To love (*agapao*), according to the Abbott-Smith Lexicon means: “To feel and exhibit esteem and goodwill toward a person”.
- b. 1Jn 3:16,17 – “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”
 - ▶ NIV: “... with actions and in truth”
- c. 2Cor 8:24 – “Therefore show to them, and before the churches the proof of your **love** and of our boasting on your behalf.
- d. In James, chapter 2, the question is asked: “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (Jas 2:15-16)
 - ▶ NASB: “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, **what use is that?**”
 - ▶ NIV: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, **what good is it?**”
 - ▶ James is using an illustration that really demonstrates something vitally important about love in order to suggest that the same thing applies to faith.
 - ∞ The point of the passage is to show that love does not “profit” ... is of no “use” ... does no “good” if it is not demonstrated and proven through deeds of love.
 - + And he implies that the same is true of faith: faith does not “profit” ... is of no “use” ... does no “good” if it is not demonstrated and proven through deeds of faith.

Our love for God must also be a demonstrated, proven love.

- a. Jn 14:15 – “If you love Me, keep My commandments.”
 - ▶ NASB: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”
 - ▶ NIV: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”
- b. Jn 14:21 – “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.”
- c. Jn 14:23 – “... “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, ...”
- d. 1Jn 5:3 – “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”
- e. 2Jn 6 – “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

The love we have for one another is to be of the same *nature* as the love God has for us.

We are to love one another with a SACRIFICIAL love.

- a. Jesus sacrificed Himself for us; and we must be willing to make that kind of sacrifice for one another.
 - ▶ 1Jn 3:16,17 – “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And **we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”
- b. And, of course, if we must be willing to give our life for one another then certainly we must be willing to give of our material prosperity for one another.
 - ▶ Ac 4:34-37 – “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
 - ▶ 2Cor 8:1-4 – “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”
- c. And there are many other ways in which our sincere love for one another will lead us to make sacrifices and concessions for one another.
 - ▶ Php 2:3-4 – “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”
 - ▶ 1Cor 8:13 – “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”
 - ∞ Rom 14:15 – “Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love.”
 - ▶ Rom 12:10 – “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;”

We are to love one another with a SYMPATHIZING love

- a. 1Pet 3:8 – “Finally, all of you be of one mind, **having compassion** for one another; ...”
 - ▶ NASB: “To sum up, let all be harmonious, **sympathetic**, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;”
- b. NIV: “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; **be sympathetic**, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

- c. 1Cor 12:26 – “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; ...”
- d. Rom 12:15 – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

We are to love one another with a SATISFYING love

- a. Our love for one another must lead us to do what we can to satisfy one another’s needs ... to the extent of our ability and opportunity.
- b. 1Jn 3:16,17 – “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And **we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”
- c. 2Cor 9:12-13 – “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,”

With all that we’ve considered to this point, I think it is easy to see that God’s love for us is as much a *challenge* to us as it is a *comfort*.

Before I bring this sermon to an end, I want to point out that ...

While God’s love is unconditional, His salvation is not.

God loves all of us (Jn 3:16), and He loves us always and forever (1Kgs 10:9; Matt 28:20).

But only the believers will be saved – the unbelievers will perish.

Listen once more to the text we began with, that includes John 3:16.

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15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

16 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.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

The fact is: “... without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).

But while it is true that salvation is conditional upon faith, we must realize that there are kinds and degrees of faith – and not just any faith will do.

- a. Proof: Jas 2:14 – “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”
 - ▶ In the Greek text there is a definite article before the word “faith” and the idea is: “Can the faith (that behaves in that way) save him?”
 - ∞ ASV: “What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him?”
 - ∞ NASB: “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?”
 - ∞ NIV: “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”

- ∞ TCNT: “My Brothers, what is the good of a man’s saying that he has faith, if he does not prove it by actions? Can such faith save him?”
- ▶ A faith that “talks the talk” but doesn’t “walk the walk” will not save. We must have a faith that “talks the talk” AND “walks the walk”.
- ▶ He goes on to point out that even the demons have faith – but, of course, it is not saving faith because it is not obedient faith.
 - ∞ Jas 2:19 – “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”
- ▶ The faith that saves is a living, active, obedient faith.
 - ∞ Read the whole section: Jas 2:14-26.
- b. Proof: Jn 12:42 – “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”
 - ▶ The faith that saves is the faith that leads the believer to confess his faith unashamedly before men: Matt 10:32-33, Rom 10:9-10.
 - ▶ The faith that saves is the faith that moves the believer to sincerely repent of his sins: Mk 1:15; Lk 13:3; Ac 3:19.
 - ▶ The faith that saves is the faith that leads the believer to humbly submit to the Lord’s requirement of baptism: Mk 16:15-16; Ac 2:38; Ac 22:16.
 - ▶ The faith that saves is the faith that causes the believer to be faithful: Rev 2:10.
- c. The fact is: the word “faith” when it is being used of saving faith is interchangeable with “obey” or “obedience”.
 - ▶ Example: Heb 3:18-19 and Heb 4:6.
 - ∞ Heb 3:18-19 – “And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”
 - ∞ Heb 4:6 – “Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,”
 - ∞ It ought to be clear that “believe” and “obey” (and “unbelief” and “disobedience”) are being used interchangeably in these verses.
 - ▶ Example: Jn 3:36 – “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”
 - ∞ The KJV and NKJV translators have done us a disservice in failing to bring out the distinction in the Greek word *pisteuo* (translated “believes” in the first part of the verse, and the Greek word *peitho* (translated “believe” in the latter part of the verse.
 - + In actuality *peitho* is a word that means: “not compliant, disobedient” according to Thayer and other lexicographers.
 - ∞ The distinction between *pisteuo* and *peitho* is correctly brought out in other translations:
 - + ASV: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”
 - + NASB: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”
 - + NRSV: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.”
- d. Saving faith is a faith like the faith of Abraham.
 - ▶ In Rom 4:11 Paul refers to Abraham as “the father of all who believe” – that is, those who “walk in the steps of the faith which Abraham our father had” (Rom 4:12).
 - ∞ Gen 15:6 – “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”
 - + Gen 26:3-5 – “Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these

lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

- + Jas 2:21-22 – “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?”

Conclusion.

John 3:16 considered in the light of the immediate context (Jn 3:14-36) and the remote context (all that the NT teaches on the subject) teaches us that we must have a *love* like the love of God and a *faith* like the faith of Abraham.