

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 6

Scripture: John 3:16

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### *The God Who Loves His World*

**John 3:1-16** (ESV) Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**Introduction** John chapter 3 is probably one of the most-referred-to chapters in the whole Bible, across the planet. Verse 16 is quoted, memorized advertised, painted, silk-screened, carved into tombstones, digitally broadcast, insisted upon, loved, hated and even gotten-sick-of and with perhaps with PSALM 23, THE LORD’S PRAYER and the TEN COMMANDMENTS—comprises all that many people know from the Bible.

There is a thing to learn about who God is from that verse. It is that God loves the world. You have it on a handout today from twelve versions, ten in English.

We are adding to holiness, sovereignty, solitariness/independency and trinity the attribute of love. John quotes Jesus as stating that God loved the world. Later, John himself would say it simply as “**God is love**” (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:8b).

οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ’ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

John 3:16 c 85 AD original text

sic enim dilexit Deus mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret ut omnis qui credit in eum non pereat sed habeat vitam aeternam

John 3:16 382 AD Latin Vulgate

Whether we say it as “God loves” something or “God is love” it is plain that *loving* is something that He is. I don’t know if Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva in Hinduism are loving or not. (They are the three main gods in Hinduism, responsible for the creation, upkeep and destruction of the world.) I don’t know if Allah is said to be loving within Islam or not or thought of much as loving. I don’t even know if Judaism thinks of God as “love” very often-although we can certainly find many references in the Old Testament to His love and to His loving acts.<sup>1</sup>

But with the coming of Jesus, and all He did and said and all that His apostles did and said it became very clear that LOVE would become a main theme in the preaching of the Gospel.

Paul wrote that ***if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing*** (1<sup>st</sup>. Cor. 13:2). Peter said to his readers, ***Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*** (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:8). Jesus told His disciples: ***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*** (John 13:34) Later, John wrote: ***Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*** (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7). But it is John (in John 3) and here in 1<sup>st</sup> John 4 who makes the deeper point—

- love is from God. (vs.7)
- Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (vs.8)
- Anyone who *does not love* does not know God. (vs. 8)
- Here’s the evidence that God is love: God sent His only Son into the world so that we (Christians) might live through Him. (vs. 9)
- The mission of the Son of God was to become the “propitiation” for *our* sins and this is sourced in the God who IS love.(vs.10)

For God louede so the world, that he yaf his `oon bigetun sone, that ech man that bileueth in him perische not, but haue euerlastynge lijf. John 3:16 1395 Wycliffe Bible

For God so loveth the world, that he hath given his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16 1599 Geneva Bible

For God so loued þe world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoever beleueeth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life. John 3:16 1611 KJV

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 1901 ASV

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 1946 RSV

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. John 3:16 1977 NASB

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. John 3:16 1984 NIV

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 1999 HCSB

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 2007 (1995) ESV

For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 1995 NET Bible

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Judges 3; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Psalm 23; Jeremiah 29 etc.

So, we add LOVE to the list of attributes of Who God is. But I know...

1. A shooter in Nevada randomly shoots hundreds of people and people wonder, "*How could a loving God allow that?*"
2. Someone you care about becomes desperately sick, dies and leaves you alone and you wonder "*How could a loving God allow that?*"
3. The Nazis come to power and in a short 12-year reign of terror sees Europe devastated and six million Jews murdered and people wonder "*How could a loving God allow that?*"
4. An earthquake kills almost a quarter million Haitians and leaves countless thousands of new orphans (Jan. 2010) and people wonder "*How could a loving God allow that?*"
5. A hurricane blasts through Puerto Rico; a killing spree in Cambodia, a Russian dictator slaughters 20 million of his own people, a devastating epidemic which they come to call *The Black Plague* kills a third of Europe, drugs called "opioids" are invented to quell pain but then thousands and thousands of people become addicted and many die, half of marriages fail and end in divorce and people cry out "*How could a living God allow all that?*"  
I get it.
6. In ancient times, Israel was besieged, captured, ravished and exiled repeatedly and surely they wondered, "*How could a loving God allow that?*"

I do not mention these things glibly or lightly. There seems to be a large cache of evidence that any god who would sit back and allow these kinds of tragedies *surely must not be loving*. Surely any God who exists, and has the slightest affection for this planet would intervene and say, "No. You, tragedy, will NOT occur." But that, of course, is the Christian world-view for the end of time. God, in His restraint and patience allows evil to play out its course in this world, yes. And the physics and effects of evil are terrible, yes. But let us not underestimate the love of God or make it just some peck-on-the-cheek. His love is why we wait on Him and why we *cling to and adore* the words of Scripture, which preserve for us:

Matthew 24 where Jesus said ***And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*** (Matthew 24:22). It is why we love what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (2<sup>nd</sup> Thess.1:6-10): ***God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.***

It is why we love the Book of Revelation which depicts God and the Son of God as bringing final justice on to the scene and righting all wrongs, healing all hurts, meeting all needs and dispatching all evil to a terrifying place called “the lake of fire<sup>2</sup>.”

Well, we say—the Bible clearly says that God is love and love itself comes from a God, who is love. He enjoys His creations. He plans for His creations. He defends His creations. And He rescues that of His creation which He sovereignly loves with the highest love.

John says that God loved the world and that is demonstrated by His gift of His Son. Jesus said **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.** (John 15:13) and we would carefully say that the greatest examples are NOT

- The soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his buddies although he has clearly loved them.
- The mother who forfeits opportunities for herself so that her children can benefit, although she has clearly loved them.
- The friend who subordinates his own wishes or personal comfort for the best interests of his friends although in that, he has clearly loved them. We could easily think of lots of noble examples of really wonderful acts of love by people for people...

In 1964 I remember going on a camp-out one time in the middle of the winter on the reservation of the Quantico Marine base in Virginia. My tent-mate forgot the tent he was providing. In order to avoid our having to hike the five miles back OUT of the wilderness, the Scoutmaster gave us his tent to use (and it *was* snowing) and he shivered all that night and tried to sleep in the assistant Scoutmaster’s truck. That was love.

The greatest example of His BEING love and willingness to DO love was our verse today (John 3:16) and which Paul later summarizes in Romans 5:8 **God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** Paul had not read John 3:16 of course because John hadn’t written it yet. But Paul surely KNEW the truth of what John would write some three decades later.

I don’t know how easy it is for you to love. If it involves a sacrifice then its probably real love. If it involves a costly sacrifice, perhaps of the thing you love the most, and a thing that is completely unique and irreplaceable, and you willingly sacrifice that thing to accomplish something else, that would be love. I am certain I have only very rarely if ever felt that kind of love for someone.

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. 20:7-10

But for our God, it is not a once-in-an-eternity occasion—it is WHO HE IS. Tim Challies designates<sup>3</sup> the love of God, as a feature of Who He is, as

*Love: God eternally giving of Himself to others.*

For us in the church, which calls itself a “Bible Church”

- Every decision I make should be first rooted to His love
- If I’m not going to love—because I think my rights are a higher priority, I need to become quiet about saying I know God.
- Sometimes I may need to WAIT (if there is a project I want to do), and pray and ask God to bring it about if it is His will, instead of insisting on my way and hurting everyone around me.
- I need to subordinate my passion for personal justice, as in perhaps, when my spouse is disappointing me, or worse abusing me. If the God I trust, receive the free gift of salvation from, sing about and talk about is about LOVE, then perhaps I need to pray more intensely and wait, before I initiate divorce proceedings.
- Maybe I need to give someone ELSE the better seat, the better parking space, the chance to sing a solo or to occupy the slot on the church ballot.

We sometimes sing a Vineyard song (2005), I hope not casually.

**You are** a Holy God , an all-consuming fire  
You're robed in majesty, bright shining as the sun  
Your ways are not our ways, Your thoughts are high above  
You are the fountain Lord of mercy truth and love (and we cry)  
Holy, Holy is the Lord God most high--Holy, Holy is the Lord most high

Our God is a holy God, a solitary and completely independent God, a Triune God, a sovereign God and a loving God. All at once. Isn't He amazing?

Today, I think we need to sing the song that the brilliant theologian Karl Barth once quoted (1962 in Chicago)<sup>4</sup> when asked what simple summary he could give of all his theology...

Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so  
Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong  
Yes, Jesus loves me; Yes, Jesus loves me; Yes, Jesus loves me  
The Bible tells me so.

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<sup>3</sup> *Visual Theology* chart on the Attributes of God, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/karl-barth.html>