

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

In one of, if not the most popular passages of Scripture, Jesus said, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." What specifically do we learn from John 3:16?

First, we learn WHO God loves because John 3:16 says, "God so loved THE WORLD." It is important to note that the "world" here is not a reference to "things in the world," which we are specifically instructed in 1 John 2:15 to "not love." Instead, this is a reference to people. But which people? Notice what John 3:16 does NOT say. It does not say that God so loved Christians, the church, or those who obey Him. Instead, it says, "God so loved the world." In other words, this verse communicates the all-inclusive nature of God's love toward people, regardless of their affiliation with Him. God's love was and is extended to everyone who falls under His jurisdiction, including those who disobey, mock, oppose, reject, and hate Him.

If the world includes such individuals, then why does God love the world? God loves the world because "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). God's love is not based on some external source. God does not love the world because of what it has done for Him or because it loves Him in return. God's love for the world was not earned or bought by the world. God's love for the world is the result of God's nature. God loves the world because He's God.

Second, we learn HOW God loves. John 3:16 says, "God SO loved the world." The word "so" is interesting because it indicates that there is a specific manner in which God loves the world. In other words, this statement is not just saying that God loves the world but that God loves the world in a particular way. So, it has to be asked—in what way does God love the world?

God loves the world ETERNALLY. In other words, His love has no end. As Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3:22, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end." That means God does not fall out of love with people. His love is constant and unchanging. There never was a time when God did not love you, nor will there ever be a time when God does not love you!

God loves the world UNCONDITIONALLY. In other words, God's love is not based on our performance. God loves us despite our performance. Paul indicates such in Romans 8:38-39, which says, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That means that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more than He does right now, nor is there anything you can do to make God love you less than He does right now. God's love is not conditioned upon your faithfulness or obedience. Our salvation is conditioned on such things, but God's love for us is not.

God loves us SACRIFICIALLY. God loved us enough to sacrifice His only Son. This sacrificial love is the specific message of John 3:16, and it is reiterated in Romans 8:32, where Paul said that God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all." God so loved the world that He unhesitatingly sacrificed His Son for the benefit of the whole world, even those who would not appreciate His sacrifice.

John 3:16 is a well-known verse for good reason because it communicates WHO God loves and HOW God loves. However, John 3:16 is also a challenging verse because it should cause us to consider whether we love Him in like manner.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What bearing should God's love for the world have on our attitude toward the world?
2. What are some practical ways that you can communicate God's love for the world to people who have not yet discovered His love for them?
3. What other words would you use to describe God's love?
4. What are some practical ways that you can communicate your love for God to Him?