

ISN'T THE BIBLE FULL OF THE LOVE OF GOD

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11.7.20

For a couple of weeks now ... I have talked about THE FEAR OF GOD.

There is not much around! Even in some churches?

Yet ... the Bible mentions The Fear of God hundreds of times.

A big part of the problem: (a) people don't believe in God and (b) the God they've heard of is a weak ... sentimental being who just loves everybody — always. Like a lovable old “granddad”. You can't really fear such a God.

Some churches relegate the “Fear of God” to the Old Testament. In the New Testament — it's all love and grace from “gentle Jesus meek and mild”.

All we New Testament Christians should preach is God's unconditional love. Romans 2:4 tells us it's the goodness of God that leads to repentance!

Last week we looked at the preaching of Jesus. It turns out that Jesus is and was actually a Hell-Fire Preacher. He preached more about hell-fire and judgment than anyone else.

Matthew 18:7-9

7 **Woe to the world** because of offenses! For offenses must come, but **woe** to that man by whom the offence comes! (*Woe— bad things are coming*)

8 “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. **It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.**

9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. **It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.**

Matthew 25:41-46

41 “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, **Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:**

42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

46 **And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**

Everlasting fire!

Matthew 25:26-30

26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

28 So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

29 **For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance;** but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

30 And **cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**

Darkness. Weeping. Gnashing of teeth. Punishment!

Jesus' preaching makes it plain that there is a judgment to come — and for some people it will be a bad calamitous judgment.

Hence ... even to His disciples ... Jesus commanded: FEAR GOD! You and I should do so too.

Hopefully ... we understand that God wants us to fear Him for our good? It's because of His love — His desire for us to experience the best.

Deuteronomy 5:28-29

28 “Then the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and **the LORD said to me**: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken.

29 **Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments**, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

Fear Me ... keep My commandments — and all will be well with them.

Jesus’ preaching in the New Testament is the same. Jesus’ warnings are out of love. He doesn’t want people to go to hell. He gave His life for all.

But today ... the Gospel message often seems emasculated? “God loves you ... no matter what”.

Many churches focus only on what good things God can do for you ... on His unconditional love and grace ... and steer clear of sin ... judgment ... hell-fire.

The preaching of Jesus would not be welcome in many churches today?

Many churches choose to focus almost entirely on the love of God. “Love ... love ... love — love is all you need” ... per The Beatles.

They don’t usually define “love” of God — but it seems to include God tolerating lots of strange behaviour. “Judge not” also applies to God.

Let’s review what the Bible says about the “love of God” and especially John 3:16 ... which seems to be one of the most popular verses. Some say that John 3:16 is “The Gospel in a nutshell”.

Now ... if the “love of God” is the key message of the Bible ... presumably the Bible is full of references?

No! Barely one verse in every one thousand verses!

The first five Books of Moses — 1 reference out of about 6,000 verses. A few in the Psalms. Hardly mentioned in the Prophets.

Maybe they are all in the New Testament?

None in Matthew ... Mark and Luke. None in the Book of Acts. A few in the Epistles. None in the Book of Revelation.

There are a few in the Gospel of John and the letters of John.

In the whole Bible — around 35-40 verses — out of a total 31,000.

Also ... the reference is loving praise to God ... or His love to believers.

The love of God is not preached to the unconverted ... only to believers — only to His family!

John 3:16

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.

This verse is usually quoted on its own. No context!

It is interpreted as God “so very much” loved the world.

It is in red-letters? So this is Jesus Himself preaching God’s love?

Let’s examine:

“So” comes from the Greek “Houto”. It means “in this manner — God so loved the world” ... or “thus — God so loved the world”. **Not** “so very much”!!

“For” is a conjunction ... it connects verse 16 with what comes before it.

John 3:1-15

1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

2 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.”

3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 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?”

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

10 **Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"**

11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

12 **If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**

13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

14 And **as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so (Houto — thus) must the Son of Man be lifted up,**

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

It is verses 14 and 15 that are being referred to in verse 16. "Thus" ... "in this manner".

Numbers 21:4-9

4 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor (*Sinai*) by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.

5 **And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."**

6 **So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.**

7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "**We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.**" So Moses prayed for the people.

8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "**Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.**"

9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

The judgment on the people was death.

God didn't remove the judgment — but made a way of escape. If they would look (intently) at the bronze serpent ... they would live and not die. They had to choose!

The uplifted serpent on a pole was a type of Jesus who was up there on a pole — as Saviour from death. If people look up to Jesus — they will live and not die.

John 3:14-16

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, **even so (in this manner)** must the Son of Man be lifted up,

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

16 For **God (in this manner) so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life.

“Even so” God loves the world. **Not** ... “so very much”.

And — exactly as with the bronze serpent — people have to choose to look to Jesus. It is not “automatic”!

Those who don't believe in Jesus will perish. They will be consumed in hell-fire.

The death penalty wasn't removed for ancient Israel. It is not removed today!!

People focus on God's “love” in verse 16 — but the same verse confirms some (many?) ... will perish — be destroyed.

John 3:17-18

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.”**

If you don't believe — you are condemned.

John 3:36

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.”** (*Amplified Bible: “the wrath of God hangs over him continually”*).

So this chapter that is so popular for mentioning God's “so very great “ love — makes plain there is wrath and destruction!

But doesn't verse 16 at least show Jesus sharing something about the “love of God” with Nicodemus ... an unconverted Pharisee?

Probably not. Although in red letters in my Bible — it is almost certain that Jesus stopped speaking at verse 15. Up to verse 15 ... there are lots of “I” ... “you” ... “we”. None afterward. The style changes.

Verse 16 refers to God's “only begotten Son”. But Jesus never uses this expression Himself. He usually calls Himself the “Son of Man” — over 80 times — including in the Gospel of John (see verse 13).

“Only begotten Son” is a term the Apostle John uses.

John 1:14, 18

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of **the only begotten of the Father**, full of grace and truth.

18 No one has seen God at any time. **The only begotten Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Some modern translations use: “only Son” or “unique Son” ... but the Greek is clear — “only begotten Son”.

So many churches quote John 3:16 as Jesus preaching about God's love to an unconverted Nicodemus ... and by extension — to “everyone”.

No! Jesus finished at verse 15. Verse 16 to the end is John's commentary on Jesus' death and sacrifice.

And despite what some think ... John's entire Gospel was written to encourage **believers** — to continue. It was not written for unconverted.

John 20:30-31

30 **And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;**

31 **but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**

By the time John wrote his Gospel ... there was major heresy that Jesus was not divine — merely a human man. Many believers had fallen away.

John's entire Gospel is written to prove that Jesus was God in the flesh — the 7 signs ... the 7 "I am" statements ... the 7 witnesses.

John is encouraging **believers** ... to keep on believing! Don't fall away! Don't heed false teachers!

John 20:31 (NLT)

31 **But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.**

John's Gospel is to believers (and Matthew's to "Jewish" believers). Mark and Luke's are to the unconverted.

John 3:16 is the most popular scripture as to why churches preach "the love of God" to absolutely everybody.

Yet ... the Bible makes very little reference to the love of God at all. And then ... only to believers.

John 3:16 is woefully misunderstood. It is tied in to the previous verses about the bronze serpent being lifted up on a pole. Even so we should be looking up to Jesus on the pole.

A Gospel message which omits the Fear of God ... and a coming “righteous judgment” for all — is a false Gospel.

If we need evidence — just look around at our societies! God is not feared. God is excluded from people’s lives.