

The Concise Presentation of God's Love

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One verse is universally known that describes God's love for us, and it is John 3:16. Here is a close-up view at what this verse expresses about God's love for us.

God's Love Is Extravagant - "for God so loved"

If the apostle Paul was the "Apostle of Grace," then the apostle John was the "Apostle of Love." John is the one who tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). And it is John who tells us that God's motivation for the salvation of sinners is love: "For God so loved . . ." John is the only one of the four Gospel authors to record these words of Jesus during His encounter with Nicodemus (John 3: 1-21). The word "so" is key. If we said it in modern English, we would say, "For God loved the world so much. . . ."

In the annex of St. Paul's Cathedral in London is a large statue of Jesus writhing in anguish on the cross. Beneath it are the words, "This is how God loved the world." And we could add, "This is how much God loved the world." It's important to remember that God didn't just say, "I love you"—He demonstrated His love by Christ dying a horrific death on a Roman cross.

God's Love Is Extensive - "the world"

Not only is God's love extravagant, it is extensive: "For God so loved the world . . ." John's first use of the New Testament verb for love, *agapao*, occurs here in a verse that would define its use throughout the New Testament—unconditional love. For God to love the world—a world completely marred by sin—means His love would have to be unconditional. For Jesus to have said that God loves the world was unheard of. The Jews prided themselves on looking down on the Gentiles. God loving the whole world was an idea unique to Christianity. Such a notion could only come from a God who is Himself love.

The entire notion of evangelism and world missions is based on the simple words "the world." Our burden is to go to all the world, with any means possible, and tell people that God loves them. History has noted some very evil characters over the years, people we think God couldn't possibly love. But that is wrong—God loves the whole world and every person in it.

God loves the whole world with an unconditional love. His love is extensive.

God's Love Is Expensive – “that He gave His only begotten Son”

God's love was also expensive: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . .”—“only begotten” meaning only or unique. There is no one like Jesus—He is completely unique in all the universe and God gave Him as a gift to us. Because He was God's only Son, His unique Son, He was priceless. God gave the most valuable thing He could give.

The apostle John summarized this truth in 1 John 4:9: “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.” By giving the most valuable thing He had, God “manifested” or demonstrated His love to us (see also Romans 8:32).

God's Love Is Expansive – “that whoever”

The Gospel is not limited just to some. God sent Christ into the world so that “whoever” might believe and be saved. God's love is directed at every person regardless of their race, creed, gender, or economic status: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

I have sometimes read John 3:16 and inserted a person's name in place of “whoever” to help people understand that they are who God is talking about. But it is still a challenge for some to believe that God's love is directed at them personally. We always think that God couldn't love me the way He loves other people. But He does! If you are alive on planet Earth today, you are loved by God.

God's Love Is Exclusive – “whoever believes in Him”

If God's love is extravagant, extensive, and expansive, then why isn't everybody in the world a Christian? Because His love is also exclusive. Out of the “whomevers” of the world it is only those who believe in Jesus that ultimately experience God's love personally. Just because God offers the Gospel to every person in the world does not automatically mean that every person is going to receive it by faith. Salvation is a gift, and like all gifts it must be received to be enjoyed.

Churches are filled with people who believe that hearing about the love of God means they are a Christian. But they are wrong. A Christian is a person who has accepted the love of God by faith in the work of Christ on the cross. If you believe and receive Jesus, then you have the eternal life the verse goes on to promise.

God's Love Is Exceptional - "will not perish"

The last two truths about the Gospel have to do with what the Gospel promises to those who believe. And the promises are amazing. First, what will not happen to those who believe: "that whoever believes in Him should not perish . . ."

Every person in the world—every person who has ever lived—will live somewhere for eternity. John 3:16 says there is an "either/or" destiny involved; we will spend eternity either enjoying "eternal life" (see the next point) or not. And the "not" option Jesus referred to as perishing. Those who believe the Gospel will not perish, meaning those who do not believe will perish.

God's Love Is Eternal - "but have everlasting life"

Finally, the last truth about God's love in the Gospel is that those who believe in Christ will have "everlasting life." Eternal life begins the moment we believe: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). To know God through Christ is to have and know eternal life. Paul says in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing—not death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things now or in the future, heaven, hell, or any created thing—"shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."

The love of God is present for every person in the world at any moment in time. But we have to reach out and receive that love. It is not easy. Many circumstances will present themselves as obstacles and reasons not to believe. But is not the promise of everlasting life the single most important reason to believe? It doesn't matter what you have done in the past. Today is the moment to believe and receive God's gift of redemption, love, and eternal life—that is the precise presentation of God's love for you.