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Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, May 25, 2008
Series – “Why Do I Believe What I Believe?”
“Would The God Of Love Send People To Hell?”
John 3:1-21

I understand that there are some 80 romantic hits.

All I Ask of You * Always on My Mind * Baby, I Love Your Way * Can You Feel the Love Tonight * Endless Love * From This Moment On * Have I Told You Lately * How Deep Is Your Love * I Finally Found Someone * I Just Called to Say I Love You * I Will Remember You * Let's Stay Together * Longer * Love Will Keep Us Together * Maybe I'm Amazed * My Heart Will Go On (Love Theme from 'Titanic') * Somewhere Out There * Time After Time * What the World Needs Now Is Love * Wonderful Tonight * You Are So Beautiful * Your Song * Love Me Tender Love Me True, and the list goes on.

And so our world basks in love, romantic love, the movies are full of it. The television serials are full of it. Why you would think that love is what makes the world go around.

When we talk of God, why He is love as well. For doesn't the Bible say in I John 4:8 that God is love? Since that is true, God in His love permits us to do pretty much what we want to do in relationships. He wants us to be happy, to be fulfilled, and to enjoy our desires and have our drives fulfilled. In fact, free love is what the God of love is all about.

God's love even affects how some look at death. One Pastor, I understand, was asked to have the funeral of a person who passed away. When the family met with him, they told him that they wanted him only to talk about the reality that God was a God of love. That is the message they wanted Him to share with the people.

The Pastor, though, responded to the family's request that the God he would talk about was a God of love, but that He was also a God who had some requirements.

It's interesting isn't it? The mind likes to develop some kind of god who will accept one's behavior so that a person is not responsible for his actions, resulting, he thinks, in his happiness and seemingly finding fulfillment in life regardless of what he is doing.

But here is the \$64,000 question.

Is love really love which gives us the opportunity to live like we please for our own self fulfillment, yes self gratification, and seeming happiness?

If you start with the popular thinking about what love is in our world today, the answer would be, "Yes." We should be able to live as we please in our relationships as men and women, and men with men, and women with women. Love has no restrictions. Furthermore, the family can be whatever you want it to be. In fact, you can believe whatever you want and somehow you will get to the good place after this life, if there is such a place. Our god is a god of love.

Such may be a soothing thought to many today in the popular politically correct arena, but thankfully, there is another kind of God who exists, not one concocted by man's tainted reason, but the eternal God who has made a revelation to us in the Bible and in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does the biblical God say?

The famous and classic verse tells: John 3:16 – Actually the words of the Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

For God so loved the world, that he gave us His only begotten (His one and only Son), that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Let me approach this classic verse and passage in John 3:1-21 this way.

I. We have here the greatest person that has always existed, exists now, and will continue to always exist.

He is the God of the Old and New Testaments.

That person is God – Theos – In fact there is an article before God in the original text stressing that “the” God so loved the world.

What does that mean with the **article** in front of the word, God? It means that the God talked about here is distinguished from all other gods that man has created in order to do as he pleases. It means that the God of the Bible is the one and only God.

In the Old Testament the biblical God is called Elohim, the strong one, in a plural form suggesting a Triunity. In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth.

And when the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language which is called the Septuagint, they used the word, Theos, to refer to the Elohim of the Old Testament.

This means as well that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same God.

1. He is the God who is eternal –

****From everlasting to everlasting He is God (Psalm 90:2).**

****Paul pens in I Timothy 1:17-** “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen.”

2. He is the God who created the world.

****Genesis 1:1 –** “In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth.”

****Acts 17:24,** when Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and told the Greek philosophers who didn't believe in the biblical Creator God, and who were involved in idolatry, **“The (note the article, suggesting He is the only God) God** (Theos) who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.”

3. He is the God who is holy – without sin, totally pure.

****God told his people Israel through Moses,** “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19:1).

****Isaiah records a Seraphim,** an angel, calling out to another, Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3).

****Peter quoting Leviticus 19:2** “because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16).

Tozer suggests that the greatest word in any language is its word for God. Elohim, Theos, tells us that the biblical God is unique in His person. He exists in and of Himself, without a beginning and end. He is the Alpha and Omega, at the beginning and the end of time. He is eternal. Yes, He's the Creator. Yes, He is holy.

But is that all there is to the eternal, Creator, and holy God? He just lives in His ivory tower so to speak?

Obviously not. For secondly,

II. We have here the greatest action of the greatest person, the biblical God.

For God so loved

The translation could read, “for(so - in this way,(emphasized here) the God loved . . .

What?? This only God who is eternal, the Creator, and holy God, loves? WOW! That should get anyone's attention.

That means the one and only God, Elohim, Theos has emotion, He is a person and He is moved out of His person to take action. Yes God is love that describes His nature.

1. The Old Testament tells us Elohim is the God of love.

****Deuteronomy 4:35-37** -God told Israel, "That the LORD He is God (Elohim) . . .out of heaven He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. Because He **loved** your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power. . . "

****Deuteronomy 7:9** God tells Israel that the LORD you God, He is God (Elohim) who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness (His hesed – steadfast love and grace) to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments" . . . then Deuteronomy 7:13, "He will love you and bless you and multiply you."

****God told Israel** that He loved the nation with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3).

2. The New Testament tells us that Theos is the God of love.

John 3:16, the verse we are considering tells us that God is love and He loves.

****Romans 5:8** – God proves His love toward us.

****I John 4:10** – In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.

3. The description of God's love in the Old Testament.

****Going back to Deuteronomy 7**, we discover in verse 9, as we mentioned, that God tells Israel that He loves his people to the 1000th generation, then in verse 10 God also tells Israel that if they turn against Him he will bring judgment.

What is God saying? God's love is also holy and pure and has standards. When God's love is turned into rebellion against Him and against His covenant with His people dire consequences can result.

****That means that God's love is holy love.** It is pure love. That's why the Ten Commandments are really an expression of God's holy love. That's why Paul writes to the Romans in 13:10 – that Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Atheists today don't like the God of the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament either, although the humanity of Christ is somewhat appealing to them. Why is the God of the Old Testament rejected by the atheists? They don't understand that the God revealed in the Old Testament has holy love and evil, which is directly opposed to His holy love, must be dealt with through His holy love.

But God's holy love must deal with that which is against God's holy character.

At the same time, God graciously deals with His people seeking to bring them back to Himself through the different prophets He sends their way.

****This means that God has love in abundance, Jeremiah 9:24 – "I am The LORD who exercises loving kindness." Jeremiah 31:3 – "With lovingkindness I have drawn you."**

****Jeremiah 31:3** - God's love is eternal. "I have loved you with an everlasting love. Since God is eternal, His love is eternal.

4.The description of God's love in the New Testament.

****God's love is sacrificial.**

John 15:13 – "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for His friends."

Romans 5:7 – "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for a the good man someone would dare even to die."

****God's love is unconditional** – doesn't expect a response, a pay back.

Luke 23:34 – "Father forgive them, for they know what they do."

While hanging on the cruel cross, as the crowd jeered at him and railed at him, suffering immensely, He received out in forgiveness to His accusers.

Romans 5:8 – "While we were sinners Christ died for us."

****God's love is holy.**

I John 1:5 - He is light. In Him is no darkness at all.

When we talk about the biblical God being a God of love, we must remember that God defines love, not that love defines God. Thusly, we know that God's love is not something that accommodates itself to the behavior of man, but its that which raises the standard of conduct to the holy character of the true and living God.

****God's love has feelings but His love is not based on His feelings but rather on His commitment to Himself and to His Word, which is really the New Covenant.**

Such is really tied in with the Old Testament Abrahamic Covenant which is made in Genesis 12:1-3, then expanded in the Old Testament and in the New Testament Christ becomes the one to fulfill it.

But in Hebrews 6:13-20, we are told that God cannot lie and that is portrayed, FIRST in the promise (His Word) to Abraham, yes, His Word to Abraham in that covenant made with Him which touches us today through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant aspect of that Abrahamic Covenant. And SECONDLY through God's oath that rests on His unchanging character.

God's love, then, is based upon His Word which does not change, and His Word is based upon His character which does not change. When God says something in His Word about His Love we can count on it. God does not go back on His word, because He never lies. His Word is always dependable.

****God's love is rich in mercy**

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." (Ephesians 2:4).

Mercy means that God doesn't give us what we deserve. We deserve His judgment, but He gives us mercy in His Son.

****God's love is eternal.**

Romans 8:38-39 – Nothing or no one can separate us from the love of God which in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I Corinthians 13:13 – But now faith, hope, love, abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Why? God's love is eternal.

In this way, the God – The greatest person who has always lived, is living, and will always continue to live.

In this way, the God loved – The greatest action of the greatest person.

III. The greatest object for the God who loved.

What does the text say?

In this way, the God loved the world.

1. The meaning of the word, world.

The word for world is cosmos. The word from which we get cosmetics.

It means to have order and embellishment, the living order of things.

In this text it means here the human race, all living individuals on earth.

2. The word, world is a sweeping statement.

What a sweeping statement Jesus makes here. In this way, the God so loved the human race. Red, yellow, black, and white, all are precious in His sight. Jesus loves all the children of the world - all of us here, regardless of age and what we have done, all who are a part of His cosmos.

The biblical God loves us all with His sacrificial, unconditional, holy, unchanging and eternal love.

We think of what is going on in our country and the world today in the breakdown of immorality, of the family, in other relationships. The hatred that is the hearts of people. The selfishness that is displayed in our society. The deception that is rampant. The rebellion against the biblical God.

In spite of all that, God loves humanity in their sinful and rebellious life-style regardless of who they are.

That is revolutionary. To think that God, who knows what all people are like, loves all the people in the world regardless of who they are and what they have done.

That's phenomenal, and the biblical God is the only God who expresses that kind of love.

IV. The greatest gift that the God of love gave to the world.

We can talk about God's love being sacrificial, unconditional, holy, based on God's commitment to His word and His character, even talking about God's love being eternal. We can talk about the reality that God loves the cosmos – you and me, and everyone in the world.

But is there some ultimate evidence that such statements are a reality?

What does the text say.

In this way, the God loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

1. The greatest gift God gave to the cosmos, to humanity, is His Son – who is Jesus Christ who became incarnate.
2. That God gave Him is obvious that the Son existed before He came to earth, telling us of His preincarnate person as deity.
3. This is indicated in the words, only begotten, which refer to His eternal generation, that He always existed. He is one of a kind. He is the eternal Son of God.
4. Jesus Christ, then, has the same nature as God His heavenly Father.

John 1:1 puts it this way, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the Word was God." The Word, refers to Jesus Christ who became flesh (John 1;14). The Word was God not a God. He was deity in flesh. Implied in John 3:16 is the close relationship that Jesus had with His heavenly Father before coming to earth, as well as the triunity, as the Holy Spirit is talk about later by Jesus as recorded by John.

What a gift God the Father gave to the world, to you and me, to everyone who lives on planet earth. He gave us His Son, who was God who took upon Himself flesh. He became the God-man.

Certainly God's Son was the ultimate gift to the cosmos, to humanity. Why so?

V. The greatest person, in His love, gave the greatest gift, His Son, to meet the greatest need of the cosmos.

Again, what does the text say?

Notice the words, "should not perish."

1. **The meaning** of the word, perish.
The word perish means to be lost, to die, a state of eternal ruin.
2. **Something, then**, has gone wrong with the cosmos, with humanity.
Humanity is lost, gone their own way, away far from God, going to a state of eternal ruin.
3. **In John 3:17**, Jesus tells us that the cosmos is already under the judgment of God, under His condemnation.
4. **The cosmos** is on a course to spiritual death as well as physical death.
5. **In fact what we see** in the behavior of man today is evidence that he is under God's condemnation and is simply displaying that he is related to Adam having his sin nature and rebellious spirit against the true and living God.
6. **The cosmos**, has a spiritual need, being a sinner before God, that is taking him on a spiritual journey far from the biblical God.

But notice the little word, "not." It comes before the verb, perish, emphasizing that the state of perishing can be reversed, can be changed.

How does that happen?

VI. The greatest person, who in love gives the greatest gift His Son, has His Son do the greatest work to meet the greatest need of the cosmos.

The Son of God does the greatest work for the greatest need of the cosmos – to reverse the cosmos' condition of perishing, of going to eternal ruin.

How does the Son of God do that?

He is willing to submit to His heavenly Father and go to that old rugged cross to represent you and me, as the perfect sacrifice for our sin, be made sin for us, who knew no sin, to pay the penalty for our sin, which is death, be buried and rise again from the dead on the third day (II Corinthians 5:21).

Through His death, burial, and bodily resurrection, Jesus satisfies the righteous demands of the Holy God, pays the penalty for our breaking God's laws, and provides us the opportunity to be rescued from perishing to be placed into the God's eternal family.

Over John 3:16 should be placed the sign of the cross and the open tomb.

Herein is love, pens John in his first letter. "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation, the satisfaction, for our sins" (I John 4:10).

Romans 5:8 – God proved His love for us, that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

The only place where the culmination of God's love is displayed is in the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's why the cross and open tomb display the ultimate of God's love to us and for us.

Throughout eternity we will worship and serve Him who is the Lamb of God, the One slain from the foundation of the world. His hands and side will be evidence to us forever that His love was displayed for us.

That's why Fanny Cosby, who was blind, wrote that when she gets to heaven she will know Jesus by the nail print in his hands.

But there is another part to this text.

VI. The greatest response that can be made to the Son's greatest work for the greatest need of the cosmos.

Notice again our text.

In this way, the God loved the cosmos, that He gave is only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal live.

The greatest response that a person can make to the greatest work that the Son has done for a person is found in the word believe.

1. The meaning of the word, believe.

The word for believe is Pisteuon. It means to trust, to commit one's self to the charge of someone. To have faith in. It is really transferring one's trust from one's self to who Jesus is as the God-Man, asking His forgiveness of one's sins, and claiming Him as one's Savior, inviting Him into one's life. It's calling on the name of the Lord for His forgiveness and eternal life. **In so doing, the believer is born from above by the Spirit of God, as Christ told Nicodemus.**

2.The one who believes in Jesus as one's personal Savior is rescued from perishing. Why? What does the text say? The person who believes in Jesus as one's personal Savior, shall not perish but have eternal life.

The believer in Jesus Christ who is going the way of spiritual death outside of Christ, now as a believer in Christ is given spiritual life, eternal life, the very nature of God Himself.

What a contrast in this verse! What a rescue!! No longer destined for eternal death, but now having eternal life through faith in Christ, the believer possesses that eternal life now with the promise of being with Christ forever beyond this life. That is an eternal rescue for sure! Amen.

3. The one who doesn't make the greatest response to accept Christ as personal Savior will perish, or experience spiritual death, separation from God forever.

Note John 3:17- "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world but that the world might be saved through Him."

Then John 3:18 – "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Also note John 3:36 – "He who believes in the son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him."

What are the verses saying? God provides the opportunity for people to respond to His Son to deal with their greatest need – the need to receive His eternal life, and live for Him.

4. Those who don't accept Christ as personal Savior will eventually be placed in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). From Revelation 20:10 we discover it is a place where people will be tormented day and night in eternal separation from God.

Jesus referred to this awful place as hell or Gehenna, which in Jesus' day was a place in the Valley of Hinnom where human sacrifices had been offered (Jeremiah 7:31), and where the continuous burning of rubbish made it a contemporary illustration of the lake of fire.

That's why in Mark 9:43-48 Jesus said that hell had unquenchable fire where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

The Bible is clear that hell or the lake of fire is a literal place. Jesus taught there was a hell. If he believed there was a hell, there is a hell.

- **Some in the evangelical community today try to say that hell is not a place where there is eternal punishment. A God of love would not put those who reject Him in a place where there would be eternal punishment, so God just does away with people who reject Christ. There is no eternal suffering.**

The Bible does not say that for taking Christ's words at face value, as well as the Book of Revelation chapter 20, hell is a literal place as this church building is a literal place.

- **Others say that since God is a God of love he would not send people to hell, for He will somehow make it possible for everyone to end up in heaven. A God of love is not a God who would even have such a place as hell.**

The answer is that God who loves does not send anyone to hell. He is not that kind of God. His invitation is open to anyone and everyone to consider His Son who came to provide eternal life for everyone who will believe in Him as personal Savior and live for Him. In fact everyone outside of Christ is bound for hell by being in Adam. God is giving individuals today the opportunity to respond to who Jesus is and what He has done for them on the cross and through the open tomb.

A person ends up in the lake of fire by not accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior. The God of love is offering His Son, the greatest gift, to deal with man's greatest need, to be rescued from spiritual death, eternal separation from God. It is up to each of us to give the greatest response to Christ, the response of faith in HIM!! Each individual must be the choice for Jesus Christ, which means that an individual rejecting Christ sends himself to hell not the loving and just God.

So what's your and my response today to this teaching of Jesus?

1. Make sure that we know Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior (John 3:16; I John 5:11-13)
2. Thank our God that He is a God of holy and eternal love (I Timothy 1:17).
3. Thank our God that His commitment to us as believers is forever (Romans 8:37-39)
4. Ask the Lord to give us the same passion for those perishing as He has (Matthew 9:36-38).
5. Be praying for those around us who need to know the Lord personally (Romans 10:1).
6. Ask the Lord to give us an opportunity to share Christ's love with someone this week (Ephesians 6:18-20).

In the bulletin you found a tract by Max Lucado entitled, 3:16, based on a book he has written. I want to challenge you this week to give that to someone who you know needs to experience God's love in Christ. Perhaps, there is someone you have been praying for, and you can give them that tract this week, or you may just want to give it to someone in a store or at some other time.

You and I are Christ's ambassadors to represent Him. He has chosen us to be the instruments of His love to others.

Bill Bright, who was led to start the Campus Crusade For Christ ministry a number of years ago and is now with His Lord, tells the true account of a Japanese schoolboy who once showed his courage in a way that puts many of us to shame.

He went to a school in Nagasaki with about 150 other boys, and he was the only Christian among them all. He brought his lunch to school, as he lived at a distance. As he began to eat his lunch each day, he dared to fold his hands to pray and ask a blessing on his food.

The lad had some enemies among the other boys, and they went to the schoolmaster and accused him of "doing something in the way of magic." The schoolmaster thereupon called the boy before the school and asked him what he had been doing.

The little fellow spoke up bravely. He explained that he was a Christian, and that he had been thanking God and asking Him to bless the food.

To the boy's surprise, the schoolmaster burst into tears, and put his head down on the desk. He then looked up.

"My boy," he exclaimed, "I too am a Christian; but I was afraid to tell anyone. Now, with God's help, I will try to live as a Christian ought to live."

The courage of that young man had brought conviction to the schoolmaster, had provided him an example, and had given him a new boldness.

Our surveys of hundreds of thousands of Christians throughout the world indicate that most Christians do not witness because of their fear. They are intimidated by what appear to be giants and mountains of unbelief around them.

But as Goliath fell before a little shepherd-boy David, the giants of unbelief will fall before us if we will just be strong in the Lord "Be strong with the Lord's mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10, NLT).

How can we be strong and courageous in the Lord, and witness without fear? Not by our own power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May we be available to the Lord this week, to say a word for Him as the occasion arises, yes, to give a tract to someone about Christ's love for them.

We worship You

To You alone be the glory forever! (Rom.11:36) You are the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, to You be honour and glory for ever and ever. (1 Tim.1:17) We bless You, our God, the only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To You be honour and might forever. (1 Tim.6:15-16)

Lord, we proclaim that in the beginning, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. (Heb.1:10-12)

Lord Jesus, You are the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. You love us and have freed us from our sins by Your blood, and have made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve You and God our Father. You are the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. (Rev.1:6-20) You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Rev.4:8-11) Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise! (Rev.5:8-14) Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. (Rev.15:1-8)