

JOHN 3:16-17

The God who Loved

A Bible study guide by pianist David Nevue (<http://www.davidnevue.com/studies>)

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Study Notes & Comments...

John 3:16 is an amazing passage of scripture that most people know, or are familiar with. So much so, that it seems to me the study of it is taken lightly. Perhaps because we *think* we know it, we take the passage somewhat for granted.

For just this reason, I think a careful study and reevaluation of the passage is merited.

Let's review the passage:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

I want to begin by looking at the first six words of this passage. "For God so loved the world." Read that again and put the natural inflection there – For God *so loved* the world – you can really sense a passion here, a deep longing conveyed by the words. Have you ever loved someone so much that it hurt? You were so emotionally invested in someone that you *longed* for them? You couldn't stand to be apart? That's what's going on here. God *loves* his creation passionately. Even more, God *loves* you so much that he wants to be with you. He longs to have a relationship with you. God would do *anything*, short of forcing you, to have that kind of relationship with you.

Let's see why God loved the world so much. Read through Genesis 1:31-2:3. God created *everything* in just six days, and after that six days, he rested. Why did He rest? Because it was *finished*. The creation was complete. There was nothing more to be done!

Think of God as a master artist (which is what He is), and creating this incredible work of art for which there is *no improvement possible*. The work of art is *perfect*, there is not one single flaw, and it is so good that God himself cannot improve upon it. As an artist myself, I know that perfection with my own art is something I could never achieve. I am never fully satisfied with my own work, no matter how much of myself I invest into it. Since I myself am far less than perfect, the best I can do is create imperfect art!

That, however, is not the case with our God. He himself is perfect, and He is the master artist and designer! God's work of art is the universe and our world. God made it to perfection! This is the only way God could say '*it is finished*' in Genesis 2:1, and it is *because of this perfection*, that God *sanctified* (set apart as holy) the seventh day. You see the ultimate in perfection and righteousness had been achieved at the end of day six. The creation was *finished* and it was *perfect*. *All the work necessary* to reach perfection had been accomplished by God, the creator. There was no more to be done, so, day seven was *sanctified* and holy, and God rested in that perfection.

Now, back on day six, God, as a God full of love and compassion, created Adam, the first man (Gen. 2:7). Adam needed a helpmate, so God created Eve (Gen 2:18), and God joined them together as man and wife (Gen. 2:21-25). God then gave Adam and Eve charge over the earth (Gen 1:28) to care for it. Think about this. God created this wonderful, perfect world, and then out of love for Adam and Eve, He

put His perfect creation in their hands to care for! Wow, what a gift!

But as a God of love, he also gave Adam and Eve *choice*. God didn't create man to be a robot to do his every whim. God wants us to obey Him and stay in fellowship with Him because we *desire* to, not because we have to! God doesn't force himself on us! Look at it this way, when we fall in love with someone and marry them, we don't *force* them to marry us! We want our spouse to genuinely love us because we love them so much! The same is true for God and how he views us. He loves us so much that He wants a close, *personal* relationship with us, but He won't force us to comply!

As you know, Adam and Eve eventually chose their own desire over God's desire for them. What were the words that the serpent (Lucifer) said to Eve? First, he called God a liar (Gen 3:4), and then he took advantage of Eve's pride (Gen 3:5-6), saying that if they ate of the fruit they would be *like God*. Pride is a dangerous thing! Eve (and later Adam) wanted to take part in the *pleasure* of the fruit (Gen 3:6), and be like God. Ultimately, Adam and Eve *followed their own desire* rather than trusting in, and obeying the Word of God. They put their own will over God's will, and as a result, they immediately became separated from God (Gen. 3:8). Adam and Eve were cast out of God's perfection. (Gen. 3:22-24).

And that's how this perfect creation became imperfect. Ever since, man has continually chosen to pursue his own desires. That's why we have the corrupt and sinful world we have now. The world you see around you now is NOT the world as God created it, but the world as man has corrupted it.

But, here's the thing, and here is how we tie all this back into John 3:16-17. *God so loved the world*, that he desires to restore it, and us, to Himself. The fact that Adam and Eve chose to follow their own desire instead of God's will was no surprise to God. God knew from the very beginning that they would do this! So, God put in place a plan of redemption to save us in spite of ourselves! The story of the Bible is all about how this plan unfolds.

Now, back to John 3:16-17:

"For God *so loved* the world that he *gave his one and only Son*, that *whoever* believes in him *shall not perish* but have *eternal life*. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to *save the world* through him."

Having covered the origin of sin, now reread the passage above. Every aspect of this passage is *emphasized* with power. For God so loved (with great longing) the world (His creation), he gave his one and only (absolutely unique – a man with no sin) Son (Jesus), that whoever (anyone, anywhere), believes in him (only belief in Jesus is required), shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son (Jesus) into the world to condemn the world, but to *save the world* through him."

So, we come to Jesus. God sent Jesus to save the world!

The whole point of all of this, and of the life of Jesus, was to show us God's love. Jesus was, in essence, God in the flesh. He was God's representative to the world, to speak for God, and to show us and teach us the Way to a relationship with God. And, as John 3:16 attests, the way to a relationship with God is simple. It comes by believing in Jesus.

Jesus said, "...for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37). Jesus came into the world to testify to what truth is. Jesus also said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

You see, God is in the process of restoring all things to Himself. Why? *Because he loves us and His*

creation. God longs for a relationship with us. When Jesus, the perfect man, was put to death in our place, he became, essentially our scapegoat.

Think of it this way. You've committed murder, and you're on trial. You stand before the judge, and you deserve to die for your crime. But, in comes your defender, and your defense counsel turns out to be the son of the judge himself! The son tells his father, the judge, that he will willingly pay the penalty for your crime. He will go to the death chamber in your place so that you may be set free! There's only one catch. You have to agree to it. You have to accept that gift. If you do, you go free, and all of your crimes have been paid for – but the son is slain in your stead.

That, my friend, is the story of Salvation. It's exactly what happened to the murderer Barabbas who was set free because Jesus died in his place (See Matt. 27:15-26). And it's what God has provided for you. Jesus, you see, took your sin upon himself when he died on the cross. God is the judge, Jesus is the son, and you are the captive. Jesus came to set you free. All you need to do is accept that gift and believe in the work that Jesus did for you. That's how God restores you to Himself. You see, since Jesus has paid the penalty for your sin, if you accept that gift, from God's perspective the penalty for your sin has been paid. You are *perfect* in God's sight. You have been restored. Your sin was nailed to the cross with Jesus.

And that's the story of John 3:16-17. God wants to restore you to His perfection. You may look at yourself, even after believing in Jesus, and say 'I'm not perfect', but from God's perspective you are, because any sin you have ever committed has been applied to Jesus. He is your scapegoat. He took your punishment. You are free.

One final thing, when Jesus died on that cross, do you know what his last words were? Take a look at John 19:30. His last words were – *it is finished*. Yes, there is a direct correlation between Genesis 2:1 and John 19:30. At the end of day six of creation, all things were perfect and righteous. The work had been finished. There was no more work to be done. In a like manner, at the moment Jesus died on the cross, the work required to restore you to God was complete. The way of salvation had been provided, and a way of righteousness has been made available to you. After day six of creation, when you moved beyond that into day seven, you moved into God's perfect sanctification and rest. The same is true with the cross. Once you put your faith in Jesus, you move beyond the cross and into God's perfect sanctification and rest. Once you repent of your sin and put your faith in Jesus, the work of your salvation is finished. You have been restored to perfection in God's sight. You are free.

As Jesus said in John 8:36, "...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

The story of God's plan doesn't end with Jesus' death on the cross. After three days he returned to life! Death had no power over him! And because of that, when you give your life to Jesus you ensured that you, too, will be brought back to life in a *perfect* body after your death (1 Cor. 15:39-56).

As a believer, in death you will cast aside this body of corruption, and be raised in a body that is perfect and holy. And, you will spend eternity with God, who loved you *so much* that he sent his son to die in your place.

What a great and loving God we have!