

GraceLife Thoughts



Love and Wrath

By

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Part One

What is the world's most popular Bible verse? If you said John 3:16, [you are correct](#).

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.

How do I know that's true today? Because of a [digital survey by World Vision](#) done about two years ago. However, John 3:16's popularity is nothing new. I remember reading about it being 'most popular' and 'best known' back in the early 1970s.

Favorite Verse

John 3:16 was certainly one of my favorite verses and it was a verse I often quoted when sharing God's love with non-Christians. It was one verse that presented God's supreme love for the world, His gift to the world of 'only begotten Son,' and the promise of everlasting life for 'whoever believes in Him.' That included the fact that people did not have to 'perish' if they believed in Christ.

I used to think of John 3:16 as 'the Gospel in a nutshell,' meaning everything I needed to share with an unbeliever was available in this one verse. I learned many other Bible verses as a young Christians that were helpful in explaining God's gift (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:23), but I almost always used John 3:16 in every discussion. I still do.

Context

I am most grateful for learning about the importance of reading and studying the Bible ‘in context.’ I now refer to it as ‘text within context, from original language to original readers.’

- Text – “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.”
- Context – Entering the Kingdom of Heaven through the New Birth
- Original Language – Spoken in Hebrew or Aramaic, Written in Greek
- Original Readers – Spoken to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews – Read by Greeks and Jews

God sent His 'only begotten Son' from Heaven to earth for a particular purpose. What was that purpose? That 'whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' That has a nice 'ring' to it, but the verse raises so many questions about God, His love, His Son, belief, perishing, and having everlasting life. Where do I go to get answers to my questions? Context.

The context includes everything said between Jesus and Nicodemus in what we know now as John 3. Without the context, we can only guess at what Jesus was saying in verse 16. The word 'perish' is a key to our understanding. More about that in **Part Two**.

Part Two

The most popular Bible verse in the world is John 3:16 –

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.

Just 25 words in English and 26 in Greek –

*ουτως γαρ ηγαπησεν ο θεος τον κοσμον
ωστε τον υιον αυτου τον μονογενη εδωκεν
ινα πας ο πιστευων εις αυτον μη αποληται
αλλ εχη ζωην αιωνιον*

John 3:16 is in the last part of a discussion Jesus Christ had with a ruler of the Jews, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. They probably spoke together in either Hebrew or Aramaic, which may have looked like this –

כי כֹּה אָהַב אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָעוֹלָם עַד כִּי נָתַן אֶת בְּנוֹ יְחִידוֹ לְמַעַן
לֹא יָאבֵד כָּל הַמֵּאֲמִין בּוֹ, אֲלֵא יִנְחַל חַיֵּי עוֹלָם. יוֹחַנָּן 3:16

ܡܚܒܐ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܥܒܕ ܐܠܘܗܐ ܠܠܡܢܐ ܐܚܒܐ ܕܠܒܘܡ ܣܦܝܐ
ܘܠܢ ܕܠܢ ܕܢܚܝܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܠܐ ܢܚܝܝܢ ܐܠܐ ܢܚܝܝܢ ܠܡܢ ܣܦܐ
(Assyrian Neo-Aramaic) ܕܠܚܠܡ

Perish or Live

I'd like to focus for a few moments on two words that Jesus used in John 3:16 –

- perish
- everlasting life

Jesus said that God “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” We see in the same statement that God “loved the world,” but sent His One and Only Son from Heaven to earth on a rescue mission. Why? Because people on earth would *perish* if Jesus did not come. The word ‘perish’ is ἀπόλλυμι (*apollumi*) and means ‘to destroy, destroy utterly.’ The word carries the idea of ‘permanent, absolute’ destruction. If Jesus had not come, everyone would have died and ‘perished’ forever.

On the other side we have the promise of ‘everlasting life’ for anyone who ‘believes in Him.’ The word ‘believes’ is πιστεύω (*pisteuó*) and carries the idea of ‘trust’ based on ‘persuasion.’ People who were persuaded to trust in Jesus had the promise from Jesus that they would have ‘everlasting life.’ ζωή αἰώνιος (*zōé aiónios*), means ‘life eternal.’ Eternal life, everlasting life, is quite the opposite to ‘permanent, absolute destruction.’

Why would Jesus say those words to a ruler of the Jews? Simple. That’s not how Jews viewed their relationship with God. They believed they were God’s ‘chosen people’ and would be ‘raised up on the final day’ because of that relationship. We see this in many of the dialogues that Jesus had with Jews of His time. John 8:31-59 is one example.

Christians and John 3:16 Today

I say this with great sorrow in my heart. Many Christians today do not understand the meaning of the world's favorite Bible verse. They believe in a God of love, but not in a God of judgment. Many young Christians believe it is wrong to tell people from other worldviews (religious and non-religious) that they must believe in Jesus Christ to escape God's wrath. Yet, we cannot escape the clear words of Jesus to Nicodemus – “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Another way of saying that is – “whoever does not believe in Him will perish and not have everlasting life.” Is that the message Jesus shared with Nicodemus? It is not.

‘Well,’ you may say, ‘John 3:16 is just one verse out of many. Certainly Jesus didn't speak of God's wrath when He spoke with Nicodemus. Jesus spoke of God's love.’ Yes, Jesus did speak of God's love for the world. However, He spoke of God's love for the world in the context of God's wrath upon the world. More about that in **Part Three**.

Part Three

The world's most popular Bible verse, John 3:16, is part of a conversation Jesus Christ had with a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night ... John 3:1-2a

Nicodemus

It almost seems as if Nicodemus came out of nowhere. His name is mentioned only in the Gospel of John. Here's this Pharisee who is a member of the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling Council) visiting Jesus at night. Other Pharisees approached Jesus during the day to try to make Him look bad in front of His followers or force Him into making a 'legal' mistake that would allow them to arrest Him. Their intent was to kill Jesus. Not so with Nicodemus. He wanted to 'learn' more about Jesus and probably visited Jesus at night so other Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin would not know what he was doing.

Here's how Nicodemus approached Jesus verbally –

... 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.' John 3:2

While other Pharisees might use similar words to ‘flatter’ Jesus to get Him off His guard, I think Nicodemus meant what he said. I think he could tell that Jesus was special and that no one could do the ‘signs’ He was doing ‘unless God is with him.’

I can imagine many ways that Nicodemus may have imagined that Jesus would respond to his kind words, but I doubt he expected to hear this –

Born Again

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

What kind of response was that? Exactly the kind of response Nicodemus needed to hear. Jesus told a ruler of the Jewish people that unless a person is 'born again,' they 'cannot see the kingdom of God.' That is not what Pharisees believed or taught. The answer caught Nicodemus off guard and probably set him back on his heels a bit –

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?'

Nicodemus was a Jewish scholar. He had reached the pinnacle of his profession through years of studying, debating, and teaching, along with the political savvy necessary to become a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus took time out of his busy schedule to visit Jesus at night, called Him 'Rabbi'

even though Jesus didn't attend any of the 'right schools' for becoming a teacher, only to hear Jesus say the only way to enter the Kingdom of God was by being 'born again.'

Jews believed they would enter the Kingdom of God because of their 'physical' connection to Abraham –

They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.'

John 8:39a

Jesus made it crystal clear that being born a Jew was not going to get any of them into the Kingdom of God –

Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.' John 8:39b

The Jews viewed the scribes and Pharisees as being on the 'top rung' of the type of righteousness that would open the doors to the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not see it that way –

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Imagine that! Jesus taught thousands of people that their 'righteousness' had to 'exceed' that of the scribes and Pharisees in order to 'enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' So, how in the world could a Jew do that? Through being 'born again.'

When Nicodemus questioned Jesus a second time, the Lord doubled down on His answer –

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

‘Seeing the Kingdom of God’ is what Jews believed was their rightful inheritance as God’s chosen people, yet here was the Man performing the ‘works of God’ saying that was not enough. What did it mean ‘not to see the Kingdom of God?’ It meant they would not see God. They would not be with God. They would not dwell in His Presence. They would not receive the great benefits God had promised Israel through the prophets. Jews would suffer an eternity without God. They would suffer God’s wrath as the ‘prophets’ had declared.

Even after Jesus answered a second time, Nicodemus still did not have a clue to what Jesus meant –

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?’ John 3:4

Nicodemus was still hearing the Words of Jesus in a ‘physical’ context. His answer seems to indicate that he’s perplexed and possibly put off by what Jesus was saying. The idea of a physical ‘rebirth’ was a physical impossibility and Nicodemus made his point clearly – “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” The idea was ludicrous!

However, what Jesus said next took Nicodemus from the physical to the spiritual, which is where he should have been the entire time. Nicodemus was after all, “the teacher of Israel” (John 3:10).

Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 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. John 3:5-8

Aahhhh – being ‘born of the Spirit.’ Now we’re getting somewhere. Nicodemus responded to that with these words –

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ John 3:9

Those are the last of Nicodemus’ words to Jesus that night. What follows is Jesus explaining to a teacher and ruler of the Jews how someone is *saved from God’s wrath through God’s love*. More about that in **Part Four** of our study.

Part Four

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, How can these things be? John 3:9

That question from the Pharisee and Sanhedrin member led to one of the most powerful private discourses we have recorded from Jesus Christ. While it includes the world-famous John 3:16 about God's love for the world, that's not how Jesus began in answering Nicodemus' question.

Teaching the Teacher

Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher. He is the Eternal Son of God and has all knowledge. That fact makes His response to Nicodemus even more interesting and important –

Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? John 3:10

The Lord's answer probably caught Nicodemus off guard – again. I can't imagine that a Pharisee of the Sanhedrin expected to hear what Jesus had already said to him about being 'born again.' The way Nicodemus responded to Jesus verifies that –

How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? John 3:4

Nicodemus viewed entrance into the Kingdom of God based on physical relationship to Abraham and Moses. Jesus had to help Nicodemus understand that entrance into God's Kingdom is not based on a physical relationship, but on a spiritual relationship. Now Jesus was telling Nicodemus that as 'the teacher of Israel' he should have known this truth. We have nothing more from Nicodemus in John 3. It's time to hear from the Master Teacher, the Messiah of Israel, the Anointed One, the Eternal Son of Almighty God.

First, Jesus presented Nicodemus with His Heavenly Credentials as the Master Teacher –

Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. John 3:11-13

The Lord's use of the term 'Son of Man' would not have been lost on Nicodemus. Neither would the phrase 'who is in heaven.' Nicodemus would have been fully aware of the prophecies concerning the 'Son of Man' from the Old Testament prophets.

Next, Jesus reminded Nicodemus of God's wrath toward the children of Israel when they sinned against Him in the wilderness. You can read the full account in Numbers 21:4-9. It was only as the people of Israel who were bitten by a serpent believed God and looked upon the bronze serpent on the pole that they would live. God was angry with His people, but they lived because He loved them and gave them a way to be forgiven. Jesus said the same was true in His day –

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:14-15

Jesus told Nicodemus that He was the ‘Son of Man from Heaven,’ and that He would be ‘lifted up’ so that ‘whoever believes in Him’ should not perish but have eternal life. Then, Jesus said this –

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. John 3:16-17

Jesus said that God loved the world did not send His son into the world to ‘condemn the world,’ but that the world would be ‘saved’ through Him. Does that mean the world is not ‘condemned’ because Jesus came from Heaven to earth? Is God no longer angry (wrath) with people? More about that in **Part Five** of our study.

Part Five

I've been a Christian long enough (54 years) to have seen many changes in the 'preaching' of the Gospel of Christ. Even though that sounds like a long time to me – in the light of a two-thousand year-old Message of Good News from God it isn't long at all. Unfortunately, 54 years has been long enough to see the preaching of the Gospel go downhill fast. Why?

I think it's because the Church has 'lost its focus and its way in the world.' Many people who are in churches today are not 'in' the Church. By that I mean they are not part of the Body of Christ. Why is that? One reason, I think, is that preachers and teachers in churches have lost their focus and way. They've either forgotten or never learned what it means to 'preach the Gospel' of Jesus Christ.

My hope and prayer is that this brief series from the world's most popular Bible verse (John 3:16) will help us 're-focus' our message to match that of our Blessed Savior.

The Church (big 'C') has gone through many challenges and changes since Jesus died, rose, and ascended back to Heaven. Jesus told His disciples that the world would 'hate' them because the world 'hated' Him first (John 15:18). Then, the Lord said something very insightful to the context of our current study –

If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. John 15:19

As I mentioned, we based this study, *Love and Wrath*, on the world's most popular Bible verse, John 3:16 –

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.

Think about those three verses for a moment – John 3:16 and John 15:18-19. Let's compare what we see –

- God 'so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son'
- The world 'hates' Jesus and His followers
- Christ's followers 'are not of the world'
- Jesus chose His followers 'out of the world'
- That's why the 'world hates' disciples of Jesus

Why would the 'world' hate Jesus and His followers? Why would God 'love the world' and send His Son to the world when the 'world' hates the Son? How are Christians 'not of the world?' How did Jesus choose His followers 'out of the world?' Why would Jesus choose His followers out of the world cause the 'world' to hate them?

Let's return to our primary text to see if we can find some answers to these and other important questions.

Nicodemus and Condemnation

John 3:1-21 is what the Apostle John revealed to us about a conversation Jesus had with a ‘ruler and teacher of the Jews’ named Nicodemus. John 3:16 is followed by John 3:17 –

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

That sounds nice. God loved the ‘world’ so much that He sent His only begotten Son into the ‘world’ so that ‘the world through Him might be saved.’ Not only that – ‘God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.’ Very nice!

But wait a minute – doesn’t John chapter 3 come before John chapter 15? Yes, it does. Why would John 3 say that Jesus came to *save* the world rather than *condemn* it, but John 15 says the world hates Jesus and His followers and plans to kill them? Something’s not right here.

What do we do when we face a ‘conundrum’ in Scripture? Keep reading. We find answers to our questions in the next verses in John 3 –

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. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. John 3:18-21

Ahhh, and there is the rub, as they say. People who do not ‘believe’ in Christ are ‘condemned already.’ What does it mean to be ‘condemned already?’ The Greek is ἤδη κέκριται (*ēdē kekritai*). The word *kekritai* means ‘judgment, to pick out and separate by choosing.’ The context determines whether the judgment (choice to separate) is positive or negative. The context Jesus used with Nicodemus was ‘negative.’ That’s

why the word ‘perish’ in John 3:16 is a key to help us unlock a vital understanding of this popular verse – ‘that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’

Too many people who like to quote John 3:16 seem to gloss over the word ‘perish’ and just focus on God’s love for the world. To ‘perish’ (ἀπόλλυμι) means to be ‘destroyed utterly.’ How does God’s loving the world fit with people in the world being ‘destroyed utterly?’

As John told us at the beginning of His Gospel account, in Christ was ‘life’ and the life was the ‘light’ of men. The ‘light’ (Jesus) ‘shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.’ That’s what Jesus was telling Nicodemus on the night that the ‘ruler of the Jews’ came to see the Lord. God loved the world so much that He gave His most precious gift, His only begotten Son, so that ‘whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’

Those who have 'believed' in Jesus for the last two-thousand years are 'not condemned.' They are forgiven and have 'everlasting life.' They will not 'perish.' Those who have 'not believed' in Jesus for the last two-thousand years are 'condemned already' and will not have 'everlasting life.' They will 'perish.' Their experience after death will be quite different than a true believer.

Why? What's the difference between them? Why do some receive 'everlasting life' while others don't?

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

Imagine that. Light came into the world and people in the world loved darkness rather than light. Why? Because their deeds were evil. As a former atheist I can tell you that my deeds were evil. So, why would God forgive me and not others? Salvation is not based on whether our deeds are good or evil. As God said in Genesis 8:21 – “the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth.” The key is that God loved the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son, and that people who ‘believed’ in His Son would be forgiven of their evil deeds. Not only would they be forgiven, but God would change their lives – ‘But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.’

All glory to God! All people are all evil at heart – ‘from their youth.’ None of us are worthy to enter into God’s Kingdom, but God has a way to make us ‘worthy’ – through faith (belief) in his Son.

We don't know how Nicodemus responded to Jesus at that point because the Apostle John doesn't record it for us. However, we do know that Nicodemus became a 'secret' follower of Jesus and helped bury Him after the Crucifixion (John 19:38-42). I can imagine that Nicodemus, being the legal scholar that he was, thought a great deal about what he learned from the Master Teacher that night. As he had told Jesus – '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.'

The Holy Spirit

What part does the Holy Spirit play in ‘everlasting life’ for some and ‘utter destruction’ for others? Jesus told Nicodemus

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Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 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. John 3:5-8

We’ll learn more about the part the Holy Spirit plays in John 3:16 in **Part Six** of our study.

Part Six

The word 'Trinity' is not in the Bible.

I used to love saying that to Christians when I was an atheist with a radio talk show. It usually upset them, which caused them to get flustered on air. However, as I was to learn later, that does not mean the 'Trinity' is not in the Bible. In fact, our current study is an example of the 'Trinity' working together to bring about the 'salvation' of people in the world who 'believe' in Jesus Christ.

Let's go to our primary text.

The Trinity in John 3

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' John 3:5-7

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. John 3:16-17

So, where's the Trinity? God in Three Persons?

1. God the Father
2. God the Son
3. God the Spirit

God the Father sent God the Son who sent God the Spirit. The purpose? The salvation of those whom the Father had given the Son (John 17). So, what about the Spirit?

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. John 16:7-15.

Okay, that's all well and good, but where's the Holy Spirit in John 3?

Nicodemus and the Holy Spirit

Nicodemus was a ‘ruler and teacher’ of the Jews. He was a Jewish scholar. He knew the Hebrew Bible inside and out. He knew all the religious rules – how to teach them and how to enforce them. [He was also a member of the Sanhedrin – the ruling council of Jews.] So, imagine his surprise when Jesus told him – ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus could not see how that was physically possible – ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Nicodemus, as smart and educated as he was, just didn’t get it.

As we saw earlier, ‘unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’ Jesus was not talking about physical birth, which is what Nicodemus thought He meant. Jesus referred to being ‘born of the Spirit.’ That would occur as someone ‘believed’ in Jesus. They would not be ‘condemned’ (doomed to utter destruction) –

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.

Jesus told His disciples on the night before He was arrested and crucified that He was going to return to His Father and send ‘another Helper’ to guide them into ‘all truth.’ The Holy Spirit would do three specific things when Jesus sent Him –

And when He has come, He will –

1. convict the world of sin
2. convict the world of righteousness
3. convict the world of judgment:

What Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 connects directly to what Jesus told His disciples in John 16. No one could enter into the 'Kingdom of God' unless they were 'born of the Spirit.' The Spirit brings about that 'new birth' through the process of 'convicting' people of their sin because they 'do not believe in me,' of 'righteousness' because Jesus went 'to His Father,' and of 'judgment' because the 'ruler of this world is judged.'

That's what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world today. God 'so loved the world' that He 'gave His only begotten Son' that 'whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Jesus loved the world and His Father and laid down His life to 'save that which was lost.' The Holy Spirit loves the Son and the Father, and 'convicts' people of their sin and need of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

The Trinity working perfectly as One to bring about the salvation of those who will 'believe.'

Wrath

Okay, but what about this ‘wrath’ thing? The series is titled ‘Love and Wrath,’ so where’s the wrath? We’ll get into that in **Part Seven** of our study.

Part Seven

The word 'wrath' is found hundreds of times in the Bible. It generally means 'burning anger, fury, rage, vexation, indignation, agitation, irritation, to be hard, severe or fierce.' The word is used sometimes for the anger or rage of humans and animals – sometimes for the anger of God. But why would God be angry? Isn't God 'love?'

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 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. 1 John 4:7-9

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 1 John 4:16

That reminds us of what John wrote in his Gospel account – the theme verse for this series –

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. John 3:16

But what about this verse in the same chapter of John's Gospel?

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. John 3:36

Why would a 'loving' God be angry with people who don't 'believe the Son?' Why would the wrath of God 'abide' (remain, stay) on those people? How do we understand, and explain to others, that God is love and that God is angry? Why would someone of another worldview believe us when we say that God's wrath 'abides' on them because they don't 'believe the Son,' Jesus Christ? Good questions – questions we need to be prepared to answer.

Wrath

The Apostle Paul explains how God's 'love and wrath' work together in Ephesians 2. Please read Ephesians 1 for a full context of what Paul wrote in chapter 2. It appears as if he may have switched tracks spiritually or philosophically, but in fact Paul was building a theological case for how God accomplished a 'mystery' – a 'secret' – that He had kept to Himself until He revealed it to Paul. It's called "the mystery of His will" (Ephesians 1:9).

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has taught Him? Isaiah 40:13

For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' 1 Corinthians 2:16a

Who has known the mind of God? Paul wrote – "But we have the mind of Christ" God has revealed "the mystery of His will" to His people 'through His Spirit' who lives in us.

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

Now, with that introduction, let's see what we can learn about God's love and His wrath.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. Ephesians 2:1-3

Paul made it quite clear that everyone, including himself before he was saved, are 'dead in trespasses and sins.' The word 'dead' is νεκροὺς and means – 'dead, lifeless, a corpse.' Because we were spiritually 'dead,' our only course in life was to follow the 'course of this world.' Who or what controls that 'course?'

the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind

Oh, yes, and one more thing –

and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

What does it mean to be ‘by nature children of wrath?’ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς

- ἡμεθα – we exist
- τέκνα – descendant, inhabitant
- φύσει – inherent nature, origin, birth
- ὀργῆς - anger, wrath, punishment, vengeance

Why would our existence as human beings, from birth, include such a terrible relationship with someone? Someone who wanted to ‘punish’ us? For what? Who is that someone? Read on.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the

exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7

Every human being is born 'dead' – spiritually dead. All we can do is follow the 'course of this world' that is 'according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.' What does that cause a 'dead' person to do? Conduct themselves 'in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.' Is that the experience of just 'some people?' No. We "were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

Paul wrote from a position of common human experience. As Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15:22 – "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." Every human inherited more than just DNA from Adam. They also inherited a 'nature' of 'wrath' – God's wrath.

However, thanks be to God, God is 'rich in mercy.' Why? Because of 'His great love with which He loved us.' Sounds like John 3:16, doesn't it? Even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, God 'made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.'

That is how 'love and wrath' co-exist in this crazy world of ours. We inherit sin and death through Adam, but forgiveness and life through Christ. Why? Because God loves us. Not only does God love us even though we were 'by nature children of wrath,' He also 'promotes' us to a 'Heavenly inheritance' according to the 'counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory' (Ephesians 1:11-12). Where did that come from? 'the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself'

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

*The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.*

Amen and Amen! God's Amazing Grace.

So far we've seen Jesus speaking with Nicodemus and Paul writing to the church in Ephesus about God's 'love and wrath.' Is that it? Not by a long shot. We'll get into that in **Part Eight** of our study.

Part Eight

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. John 3:16

John 3:16 continues to be the world's most popular Bible verse – and for good reason. They are the very Words of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The verse connects to every other part of the Bible (Old and New Testaments). For example –

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:15

Those are the words God spoke to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. It was God's promise that the Seed of the woman would bruise (destroy) the head of the seed of the serpent, even as the seed of the serpent would bruise the heel of the Seed of the woman. God promised to send His only begotten Son from Heaven to earth on a rescue mission to save those who would believe.

The 'Everywhere' Promise

I call this the 'everywhere promise' because you find it 'everywhere' in the Bible. After Jesus rose from the dead, He met with His disciples and opened their understanding about the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) –

Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Luke 24:44-45

That's the 'everywhere' promise. Everywhere you read in the Old Testament – Law of Moses, Prophets, and Writings – you'll find God's promise of salvation through faith in His Son. That's what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3.

As we've already demonstrated in previous parts of this series, God's promise is a combination of His Character. He is love and He is angry. He is the One who forgives and He is the One who sentences to perish. Every person who is alive today is 'by nature' a child of 'wrath.' Every person who has ever lived was 'by nature' a 'child of wrath.' Every person who will be born in the future will be 'by nature' a 'child of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3).

The Apostle Paul included himself when he wrote –

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Ephesians 2:1-3

There is nothing ‘we’ can do about it. Adam sinned against God, angered God, and brought death into the world. It is the ‘everywhere’ promise of the Bible that we have hope in what would otherwise be a hopeless world –

‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.’ 1 Corinthians 15:22

Why? Why do we have that ‘everywhere’ promise throughout God’s Word? Why would an angry God save some who were by nature ‘children of wrath?’

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the

gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:4-9

God is 'rich in mercy.' Why? 'because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses.' God 'made us alive together with Christ,' and 'raised us up together,' and 'made us sit together in the heavenly place in Christ Jesus.' That connects directly to what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:16 –

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.

It's the 'everywhere' promise. Everywhere we look in the Bible we find God's love, even as we also find His wrath.

Some people say they can see that in the New Testament, but not in the Old. One early 'church heresy' was that the God of the Old Testament was not the same God as the New Testament. Why? Because the God of the Old Testament was filled with wrath, while the God of the New Testament was loving and kind. Is that true? We'll get into that in **Part Nine** of our study.

Part Nine

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.

I shared about the ‘everywhere’ promise in the last study. Everywhere we look in the Bible we find God’s love, even as we also find His wrath. As Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 24, everything He had taught them before His crucifixion was prophesied in the Old Testament. He ‘opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.’

Some people say they can see God’s love in the New Testament, but not in the Old. One of the early ‘church heresies’ was that the God of the Old Testament was not the same God the Apostle Paul described in his letters. Why? Because the God of the Old Testament was filled with wrath, anger, and meanness, while the God of the New Testament was loving, kind, and forgiving. That’s a ‘heresy’ because it’s not true. I’ll explain.

Bad God – Good God?

There was once a man named Marcion. He lived during the 2nd century AD. His father was a pastor of Sinope, but Marcion became a follower of a 'Christian' gnostic named Credo after moving to Rome. Credo is believed to have been a follower of Simon Magnus in the early 2nd century. He taught that the 'God' of the Old Testament was not the Father of Jesus Christ.

Without getting too deep into Marcion's teachings, let me give you an overview. One of the reasons I want to do this is because this ancient heresy has found its way back into the teachings and beliefs of modern Christianity.

Marcion believed in a 'Creator God' and a 'Supreme God.' He quoted Isaiah 45:6-7 to describe the 'Creator God' – 'I am the Lord, and there is none else; I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil.' Marcion said that proved 'this god is the author of evil.' Marcion believed this 'Creator God' was harsh and judgmental. Marcion also believed that the 'Christ' (Messiah) Isaiah wrote about was a 'different' Christ than Jesus. Not only did Marcion teach a theology of two Gods, he also taught a theology of two Christs.

Based on what Jesus said in Luke 6:43-44 – 'For an evil tree bringeth forth not good fruit; neither does a good tree bring forth evil fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit' – Marcion believed there must be another God who produced the good fruit of love and generosity. Marcion saw God the Father of Jesus Christ as being the 'Supreme God' who did good and was gentle in His behavior. Marcion did not believe the qualities of the 'Creator God' and the 'Supreme God' were compatible, so he believed and taught that there were two Gods. One was vengeful, full of wrath and anger, and jealous. The other, the Father of Jesus, was loving, kind, and good.

Marcion developed and taught his theology and it became known as *Marcionism* in the middle part of the 2nd century. The Roman Church reportedly accepted Marcion into fellowship for a time, but eventually excommunicated him because of his teachings. It's no wonder since he rejected the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and many of the teachings of the Jewish apostles (e.g. Peter, James, John). Marcion believed that the teachings of the Apostle Paul were the only ones the Church should follow. Marcion's 'Bible' included a 'mutilated' version of Luke's Gospel, and ten of Paul's letters. That was it.

As you can imagine, that did not sit well with the Church Fathers of the 2nd century AD. One influential Church Father, Tertullian, wrote a five-book series titled *Adversus Marcionem* (*Against Marcion*). Tertullian argued that God is both loving and just. I agree and hope this series is making that point clearly. If you'd like to read Tertullian's series 'Against Marcion, [click on this link](#) and look for Books I – V.

Two other early Church Fathers of the 2nd century you may want to read who wrote defenses against Marcion's heresy include Justin Martyr and Irenaeus –

And there is Marcion, a man of Pontus, who is even at this day alive, and teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. And he, by the aid of the devils, has caused many of every nation to speak blasphemies, and to deny that God is the maker of this universe, and to assert that some other being, greater than He, has done greater works. All who take their opinions from these men, are, as we before said, called Christians; just as also those who do not agree with the philosophers in their doctrines, have yet in common with them the name of philosophers given to them. And whether they perpetrate those fabulous and shameful deeds—the upsetting of the lamp, and promiscuous intercourse, and eating human flesh—we know not; but we do know that they are neither persecuted nor put to death by you, at least on account of their opinions. But I have a treatise against all the

heresies that have existed already composed, which, if you wish to read it, I will give you.

And, as we said before, the devils put forward Marcion of Pontus, who is even now teaching men to deny that God is the maker of all things in heaven and on earth, and that the Christ predicted by the prophets is His Son, and preaches another god besides the Creator of all, and likewise another son. And this man many have believed, as if he alone knew the truth, and laugh at us, though they have no proof of what they say, but are carried away irrationally as lambs by a wolf, and become the prey of atheistical doctrines, and of devils. For they who are called devils attempt nothing else than to seduce men from God who made them, and from Christ His first-begotten; and those who are unable to raise themselves above the earth they have riveted, and do now rivet, to things earthly, and to the works of their own hands; but those who devote themselves to the contemplation of things divine, they secretly beat back; and if they have not a wise sober-mindedness, and a pure and

passionless life, they drive them into godlessness. [Justin Martyr, First Apology](#)

1. Cerdo was one who took his system from the followers of Simon, and came to live at Rome in the time of Hyginus, who held the ninth place in the episcopal succession from the apostles downwards. He taught that the God proclaimed by the law and the prophets was not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the former was known, but the latter unknown; while the one also was righteous, but the other benevolent.

2. Marcion of Pontus succeeded him, and developed his doctrine. In so doing, he advanced the most daring blasphemy against Him who is proclaimed as God by the law and the prophets, declaring Him to be the author of evils, to take delight in war, to be infirm of purpose, and even to be contrary to Himself. But Jesus being derived from that father who is above the God that made the world, and coming into Judaea in the times of Pontius Pilate the governor, who was the procurator of Tiberius Caesar, was manifested in the form of a man to those

who were in Judaea, abolishing the prophets and the law, and all the works of that God who made the world, whom also he calls Cosmocrator. Besides this, he mutilates the Gospel which is according to Luke, removing all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord, and setting aside a great deal of the teaching of the Lord, in which the Lord is recorded as most dearly confessing that the Maker of this universe is His Father. He likewise persuaded his disciples that he himself was more worthy of credit than are those apostles who have handed down the Gospel to us, furnishing them not with the Gospel, but merely a fragment of it. In like manner, too, he dismembered the Epistles of Paul, removing all that is said by the apostle respecting that God who made the world, to the effect that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also those passages from the prophetic writings which the apostle quotes, in order to teach us that they announced beforehand the coming of the Lord.

3. *Salvation will be the attainment only of those souls which had learned his doctrine; while the body, as having been taken from the earth, is incapable of sharing in salvation. In addition to his blasphemy against God Himself, he advanced this also, truly speaking as with the mouth of the devil, and saying all things in direct opposition to the truth,-that Cain, and those like him, and the Sodomites, and the Egyptians, and others like them, and, in fine, all the nations who walked in all sorts of abomination, were saved by the Lord, on His descending into Hades, and on their running unto Him, and that they welcomed Him into their kingdom. But the serpent which was in Marcion declared that Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and those other righteous men who sprang from the patriarch Abraham, with all the prophets, and those who were pleasing to God, did not partake in salvation. For since these men, he says, knew that their God was constantly tempting them, so now they suspected that He was tempting them, and did not run to Jesus, or believe His announcement: and for this reason he declared that their souls remained in Hades.*

4. *But since this man is the only one who has dared openly to mutilate the Scriptures, and unblushingly above all others to inveigh against God, I purpose specially to refute him, convicting him out of his own writings; and, with the help of God, I shall overthrow him out of those discourses of the Lord and the apostles, which are of authority with him, and of which he makes use. At present, however, I have simply been led to mention him, that thou mightest know that all those who in any way corrupt the truth, and injuriously affect the preaching of the Church, are the disciples and successors of Simon Magus of Samaria. Although they do not confess the name of their master, in order all the more to seduce others, yet they do teach his doctrines. They set forth, indeed, the name of Christ Jesus as a sort of lure, but in various ways they introduce the impieties of Simon; and thus they destroy multitudes, wickedly disseminating their own doctrines by the use of a good name, and, through means of its sweetness and beauty, extending to their hearers the bitter and malignant poison of the serpent,*

the great author of apostasy. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies

Modern Marcionism

I agree with the early Church Fathers that Marcion was a heretic and his teachings were dangerous. They were absolutely without any merit or basis in truth. So, how is it that many, and I mean **many**, in the modern Church are teaching the same thing as Marcion? That includes many pastors and teachers in what some might call 'evangelical' churches. We'll look for answers to those questions in **Part Ten** of our study.

Part Ten

Have you ever heard of the ‘Cafeteria Bible?’ That’s what a man named Marcion developed in the early 2nd century AD and what U.S. President Thomas Jefferson built in the early part of the 19th century. They both chose to keep the parts of the Bible they liked and throw out what they didn’t.

Even though neither of those ‘Bibles’ are the preferred versions among most ‘evangelical’ Christians today, there’s not much difference in how people ‘use’ God’s Word. Today’s Christians may carry a full translation of the Bible (or have it available on an ‘app’), but they often read only what suits their personal belief system and lifestyle. I think they’ve forgotten what Jesus told the devil – ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ Or what we read in Proverbs 30 – ‘Every word of God *is* pure.’

Notice the word ‘every’ in both the Old and New Testaments. ‘Every’ Word of God is pure. ‘Every’ Word that God speaks is our spiritual ‘bread.’ Not only do many Christians not read ‘every’ Word of God, they often don’t know how to use the words they do read. They don’t know how to do what the Apostle Paul told Timothy to do with the Bible – ‘rightly dividing the word of truth’ (2 Timothy 2:15). That simply means ‘handling God’s Word correctly.’

Many modern Christians are not drawn to the Old Testament because they don’t like the God of the Old Testament – just like Marcion. They view God as too mean, too angry, too vengeful, too jealous, not loving or kind. Many Christians struggle with the God they read about in the Old Testament and the Jesus they read about in the New Testament. While most Christians don’t remove the Old Testament or portions of the New Testament from their Bibles, many ‘handle’ their Bibles (or ‘apps’) as if some things God says aren’t important or don’t matter.

Other people, like President Jefferson, don't buy into the miracles of Jesus. They prefer to view Him as a type of ancient 'guru' or 'holy man' who told some cool stories about living a 'moral' life. Interestingly, Thomas Jefferson called his 84-page 'Bible' – 'The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth.'

Heresy for Breakfast?

I'm trying to be nice here by saying that 'Christians' who don't like the God of the Old Testament or don't believe in the miracles of Jesus (e.g. Virgin Birth, Healing the sick, Raising the dead, His own Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into Heaven, etc.) are 'just wrong.'

Being less nice – if you don't believe in the miracles of Jesus, you are 'eating heresy for breakfast.' You are starting every day on the wrong 'spiritual' foot. Your 'theology' (beliefs about God) don't match what God has already revealed about Himself in His Word. If you don't like the God of the Old Testament because you think He's a 'meanie,' then that's what you think about Jesus Christ – because Jesus is the Son of God. You can't divide Jesus from the God of the Old Testament if you 'rightly divide the word of truth.' In fact, you are actually 'mangling' the Word of God.

Why am I saying things that may 'offend' my brothers and sisters in Christ? Because they need to be 'offended' – not by me, but by the Truth of God's Word. We need to 'wake up!'

*Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'
Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.
1 Corinthians 15:33-35*

For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.' See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:12-16

At War

We are 'way past' the days of playing nice in Christianity – trying not to be offensive, trying not to make unbelievers or people who think they are believers 'uncomfortable.' We are AT WAR!

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Ephesians 6:10-13

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

If you think you're alone in this battle, think again. Jesus fought it first –

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. Luke 4:1-2

Jesus fought the devil face to face. The devil eventually entered into the traitor Judas Iscariot, which led to Christ's death on the Cross. However, it was that death that provides our 'justification.' Christ's resurrection from the dead provides our 'glorification.' If you don't believe that, please think again. You are not following the direct guidance of Christ following His encounter with the devil –

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel. Mark 1:15*

'Repent, and believe in the gospel.' That's where our battle begins. Once we 'repent' (change your mind) and 'believe' in the Gospel of Christ (His 'good news'), then we have a new enemy and find ourselves in a new war. Be prepared to fight. Look at Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 10 again. Look at it like a warrior in the middle of a war, not as a bystander watching other people fight. If you are a Christian, you are in the middle of a spiritual war.

Manual of War

The human race has been ‘at war’ since Genesis 3. That’s why ignoring the Old Testament is both ridiculous and dangerous. If you don’t understand what God says and does in the Old Testament, you have just missed out on the a major part of your ‘education’ in spiritual warfare.

It is in the Old Testament that we learn how to ‘love’ even as we ‘fight.’ That’s the theme of this study – ‘Love and Wrath.’ God’s angry and we need to be angry about what makes Him angry. We also need to learn from God that He is ‘merciful, compassionate, forgiving.’ Even in the midst of ‘wrath,’ we learn that God is ‘love.’ If you shy away from the Old Testament, you’ll miss that. Don’t do that. Embrace the Old Testament, even as you do the New Testament, and learn from God.

Also study the various ‘characters’ of the Old Testament. Watch as they wrestle with many of the same things we wrestle with in life. See how they worked through their struggles with God’s guidance. What people in the Old Testament learned about God and life is what we need to learn.

Whether you’ve been in the military or not, you probably have an idea of how wars are fought. Warriors (e.g. soldiers, sailors, etc) are trained in accordance with rules and principles of warfare. That includes knowing your weapons and following the direction of your leaders. Who is the leader of the Church? Jesus Christ –

I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

Who did Jesus select to assist Him in leadership of the Church?

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

By what process did God prepare the manual for spiritual warfare?

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by

Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. Hebrews 1:1-4

What is the process that warriors must follow in order to be successful in battle?

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. 2 Timothy 2:3-4

If you are a Christian but have become 'entangled' with the affairs of 'this life,' you will not succeed. You will not 'please' God who 'enlisted' you as a 'soldier.' No one 'engaged in warfare' should do that. To lose 'focus' is to lose the 'battle.' How do we keep ourselves from becoming entangled with the affairs of this life?

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:20-26

There is a process to fighting spiritual battles and winning. We find it throughout the Old and New Testaments –

- be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work
- flee youthful lusts
- pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace
- avoid foolish and ignorant disputes
- don't quarrel
- be gentle to all
- be able to teach
- be patient
- be humble
- correct those who are in opposition

All of the wars you see Israel fighting in the Old Testament? Don't skip over them – study them slowly and thoroughly. What spiritual principles do we have from God about how to defeat the enemy? What can we learn from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, and other spiritual leaders in the Old Testament that will help us in our lives today? Did those men make mistakes? Absolutely! Did they learn important lessons from those mistakes. Some did. Some didn't. Can we learn from that? Yes, we can and must.

To follow the 'lead' of people like Marcion and Thomas Jefferson by throwing out much of God's Word is to set ourselves up for spiritual defeat. We cannot win the 'war' if we do not follow the 'full manual' of God – the Old and New Testaments.

Confidence in Leadership

It's important in warfare of any kind that soldiers 'trust' their leaders. They need 'confidence' in leadership. How does that work? We'll see in **Part Eleven** of our study.

Part Eleven

One of the most important ‘Character’ traits of God is that He **does not change** –

For I am the Lord, I do not change. Malachi 3:6

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. James 1:17

Since Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He doesn’t change either –

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
Hebrews 13:8*

The reason I mention that here is that Christians can have full confidence in their spiritual leaders – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Confidence in leadership is important to soldiers as they enter into battle.

Confidence in Leadership

When Israel turned to God they won battles. When Israel turned away from God they lost battles. That's a simple overview of the Old Testament, but it's true. God loves Israel and has always wanted His people to succeed. However, Israel often did what it wanted and God allowed them to wander from Him. They learned some hard lessons that way.

The same is true with Jesus Christ and His Church. When Christians have confidence in Christ's leadership and follow Him, we win battles. When we don't, we won't. Again, a somewhat simple overview of the last two-thousand years of Christian history, but it's true. Christians who develop a greater confidence in their own abilities and less confidence in the Lord's are doomed for failure.

We learned about the Manual for War in our last study. That's the Bible – all of it – Old and New Testaments. Even as a soldier is expected to know everything in the military 'manual' given him in basic training, Christians should view the Bible as their manual for the 'spiritual' battles we will face. In that manual we learn to trust our superior officers. They know the 'command plan' and how to implement it. Soldiers know their piece of the plan, but not all of it. The longer you spend on the battlefield, the more you learn about God's plan for the ages and the part He wants you to play in it.

Confidence in Your Fellow Soldiers

Soldiers also know the importance of being able to trust their brothers and sisters ‘in arms.’ We need to have confidence in each other. We develop that confidence through basic training and experience on the battlefield. We quickly learn who we can trust to ‘have our six’ (our back) and who we can’t. If a fellow soldier is ‘entangled with the affairs of this life’ (2 Timothy 2:4), there is little reason to be confident that they will help you in the middle of a ‘fire fight.’ I’m looking for people who are ‘all in’ in following God’s plans.

‘being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ’ Philippians 1:6

When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus that evening in John 3, He was talking with a spiritual soldier in Israel's leadership. While most Pharisees of his day were more concerned about themselves than the people they were support to shepherd and protect, Jesus saw something different in Nicodemus. He saw someone who wanted to do what was right, even at personal and professional cost.

We see in John 7 that members of the Sanhedrin (ruling council of Israel) wanted Jesus arrested. The soldiers returned empty-handed and said they didn't arrest Jesus because – 'No man ever spoke like this Man!' That answer did not sit well with the rulers. They asked if 'any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him.' Nicodemus, at his own personal and professional peril, said – 'Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?' That question from Nicodemus did not go over well with his fellow council rulers. They answered and said to Nicodemus – 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.' They didn't realize that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, which matched the prophets.

John doesn't say how Nicodemus responded to that question, if he did. However, John does tell us later that Nicodemus helped Joseph of Arimathea bury the body of Jesus in a nearby garden in a new tomb (John 19). We don't read anything more about Nicodemus by name in the New Testament, but we do read that many Pharisees and priests did become followers of Jesus after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Maybe Nicodemus was one of them.

Nicodemus may have become one of the thousands of Jews who became warriors for Jesus following the Resurrection. He may have been one of warriors who would 'have your back' in battle. We'll never know because we're not told. However, the point is that 'belief' in Christ needs to include 'actions.' Soldiers don't join the military so they can do their own thing. They join to fight and win battles! That's what we need today – Christians who are prepared for spiritual warfare.

We've Come A Long Way

We have come a long way in just eleven weeks. I hope this study from the world's most popular Bible verse (John 3:16) has been helpful to you. Whether you are struggling with the 'love and wrath' of God or you know people who are, understanding the greatness and perfection of our God is most beneficial to the life we live and the war we wage. There are a few more things of importance I would like to share with you from John 3 and we'll do that in **Part Twelve** of our study.

Part Twelve

Three months ago (12 weeks) I began this series of studies about the ‘love and wrath’ of God. Many people, including some Christians, cannot see how the ‘God of love’ in the New Testament could also be the ‘God of wrath’ we read about in the Old Testament. That thinking led to one of the most contentious theological battles of the early Church. Unfortunately, we’re having a similar battle again.

Christians love to love. So do many non-Christians. What makes Christianity different than other religious and non-religious worldviews is that God loves despite His wrath. We’re look indepth into ‘how’ He does that in previous parts of this series. Our final question is ‘why.’

Why God Loves the Ungodly

The Bible describes people as ‘ungodly.’ King David wrote many Psalms, but one that most Christians have probably heard before is this one –

Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:1-2

David went on to write –

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1:6

Notice the word ‘perish.’ It’s the same word Jesus used in the world’s most popular Bible verse –

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. John 3:16

Why would God send His ‘only begotten Son’ to give His life for ‘ungodly’ people? God made a decision in Eternity that this would be so. Jesus would die for the ‘ungodly.’ The Apostle Paul wrote about it to the Romans –

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. Romans 5:6-7

Keep in mind that the Apostle Peter wrote this about the ‘ungodly’ –

But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 2 Peter 3:7

Judgment Day is coming for the ‘ungodly.’ David said it. Jesus said it. Paul said it. Peter said it. The ‘ungodly’ will be punished. They will perish .. unless .. they ‘believe’ in Jesus. Ungodly people who ‘believe’ in Jesus will ‘not perish but have everlasting life.’ God sent Jesus from Heaven to earth to ‘save’ people. Why? Because God loves the world.

I think some of the ‘why’ is connected to things that happened before God created humans. I say that because John also wrote –

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8

Everything you see going on around you is not just ‘physical.’ Much of it is ‘spiritual.’ It’s what we might call a ‘mystery.’ God let the Apostle Paul know about many of His ‘mysteries,’ so let’s see what we can learn from Paul’s writings –

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in

the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Ephesians 3:8-12

Notice some key statements that coincide with what John wrote about why Jesus was ‘manifested’ –

- that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus
- which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ
- to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*

God is going to show ‘the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.’ Who is God’s audience for this ‘show’ of the exceeding riches of His grace?

The ‘mystery’ that God revealed to Paul was ‘hidden in God’ from ‘the beginning of the ages.’ Why would God hide something like that from everyone until thousands of years after creating ‘all things through Jesus Christ?’

We find the answer in the third point – ‘to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*.’ Paul used the phrase ‘principalities and powers’ five times in his writings –

- Romans 8:38
- Ephesians 3:10
- Ephesians 6:12
- Colossians 1:16
- Colossians 2:15

In each context, we find that Paul referred to the supernatural powers that oppose God. The Church – those who are saved through faith in Jesus Christ – will ‘show’ those ‘principalities and powers’ that God is greater than all of the powers in the universe.

We – you and me – are far more than just people living our lives on a planet waiting for the end of this life to end. We are part of something far greater in scope. We are an integral part of God’s ‘Eternal Plan’ concerning the supernatural ‘principalities and powers’ that have opposed Him through the ages.

Is there any doubt that we were all once counted among the ‘ungodly?’ No. So, why will the ‘born-again’ receive ‘everlasting life’ while those who do not believe in Jesus ‘perish?’ Because that is God’s plan – a plan He explained in the simplest and most exquisite way possible –

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.

No wonder that John 3:16 is the world's most popular Bible verse.

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