

Comforting News for the Troubles We All Face

One of the constant realities of the human condition is that we live in a fallen world. And in a fallen world, there will always be troubles. We all experience them.

Sometimes those troubles are very real, and, yet, at other times we can bring anxiety upon ourselves by means of worrying about even the possibility of future troubles. Some of those things we worry about may come and some never do, and, yet, if we're honest, sometimes our fears grip us so tightly that we may remember when we were children needing comfort from parents, who always seemed to know the right things to do and say to make everything all right.

I once read a biography of Teddy Roosevelt that focuses much on his early life. As a boy, he was very sickly, primarily from attacks of asthma. But along with his sicknesses, he was often troubled in other ways. He had recurring dreams of a werewolf hiding under his bed waiting to come and get him in the night. As a very small boy, his mother began noticing that he had a fear of church. He refused to step inside the church where the family attended unless someone was with him. When his mother pressed him about his fear, she found that he was terrified of something called "the zeal."

He said that this "zeal" was crouched in the dark corners of the church ready to jump on him. When his mother asked him what it looked like, he wasn't sure, but he thought it was probably a large animal like an alligator or a dragon. He had heard the minister read about it from the Bible.

With all the wisdom of someone who has loved and cared for a frightened child, Teddy's mother pulled out the family Bible and, using a concordance, began reading to Teddy the passages containing the word "zeal" until, suddenly, he cried out for her to stop. She had just read from the Book of John, Chapter 2, Verse 17: "And his disciples remembered that it was written, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." And don't our troubles and fears appear that way at times? Sometimes imagined and yet — like young Teddy who feared his recurring attacks of asthma — sometimes very real.

We come to a verse today that many people believe is the most well-known verse in all the scriptures. Martin Luther called this verse "The Bible in miniature." John has given us one of the foremost texts in all of scripture to describe the love of God for sinners. In this series, I want to remind us of the comfort that's found in the gospel of free grace. No matter what we may be going through, there's a real blessing in knowing what the Bible teaches about the love of God for his children. Let's begin our look at this verse by calling attention to ***God's Love: Perfection.***

Earlier in Chapter 3, Jesus has been speaking with Nicodemus about being "born again." There's clearly some confusion in the mind of Nicodemus and in Verse 9, he asks the question, "How can these things be?" Jesus' response goes, at least, through Verse 15. And yet, when we come to Verse 16, scholars do not agree on whether Jesus is still speaking. Because quotation marks were not in the original manuscripts or those that survive, this becomes a task for scholars and translators to try and determine.

It may be that Jesus is still speaking, but it could also be that Verse 16 is given by John the apostle, as he's reflecting or meditating on amazing truths of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice, now, the beginning of Verse 16; "For God so loved the world." The fact that

God is a God of love is biblically unassailable. Even if God had not created, his love is inherent in who he is. In the context, this verse is referring initially to the love of God the Father.

Some Old Testament verses that depict God's love include:

— “Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens and your faithfulness to the clouds.” (Ps. 36:5)

— “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.” (Ps. 51:1)

— “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” (Ps. 100:5)

Scripture also teaches us that God's love should inform our love for others. In 1 John 4:8, we read: “Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.”

Dr. J.I. Packer, in his well-known book entitled “Knowing God,” has written these words, “... the statement ‘God is love’ means that his love finds expression in everything that he says and does.”

We certainly want our own love to emulate God's love. Sometimes in the New Testament love is given in terms that speak more specifically of the love of Christ. For example Paul, in Ephesians 3:18-19, prays that “you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

In this passage, we see the infinite love of God in Christ that far “surpasses” human knowledge to grasp in its entirety. But there are certainly things that are true about God's love that we can know. What does it mean to say that God “so loved the world”?

As we see in the beginning of this verse, there's a sense in which we must say that God loves everything and everyone that he's made. Even those who will not acknowledge his goodness he treats with benevolence. This truth is seen in Matthew 5:45, where God is said to “make his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” This is what scholars call God's common grace. This is God's grace that shows in his generosity to all his creation.

There's clearly a tension that we see here that the scriptures don't try to gloss over. In what sense can God show his love to wicked people who will not even acknowledge his existence? In Ezekiel 18, we read of acts of wickedness such as violence, adultery, oppression of the poor and needy, and robbery. In this same chapter, we read the well-known verse: “The soul who sins shall die.” (vs. 4) Later in Verse 23, we read: “‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked,’ declares the Lord God, ‘and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?’”

God is a God of love, and it's important that we stress the love of God when we speak with others about him. The gospel is good news, and this good news is meant to be shared with all people without exception.

There's no better news to address all the troubles we face.