

God is Love – Part 3

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love**. (1 John 4:8)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Behold the Goodness

- A. W. Tozer wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."
- A proper conception of God provides the foundation of all that is absolutely essential to spiritual life and health.
- It is crucial that we maintain the biblical balance in our thinking.
- The apostle Paul wrote, "*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God*" (Rom. 11:22, KJV).
- While we study God's love, we must bear in mind that God is also holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens (Heb. 7:26); that He "*is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day*" (Ps. 7:11); and that "*if a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready; He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts*" (vv. 12–13). "*For our God is a consuming fire*" (Heb. 12:29).
- God's love, measureless as it is, does not negate any of those truths.
- One widespread misconception is that the angry-God concept is confined to the Old Testament.
- Supposedly the New Testament—and particularly Jesus—corrected this "faulty" concept, emphasizing the love of God
- The Old Testament has as much to say about the love of God as the New.
- "*The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness*" (Lam. 3:22–23).
- The New Testament has as much to say about the wrath of God as the Old.
- It was Jesus Himself, in the New Testament, who gave the fullest and most explicit descriptions of the horrors of hell (Matt. 5:29–30; Mk. 9:43–48; Lk. 16:19–31).

- And the New Testament also records these words of Jesus: "*But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed the body has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!*" (Lk. 12:5).
- The final New Testament description of Christ in His Second-Coming glory says, "*From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty*" (Rev. 19:15).
- The same God reveals Himself to us in both Testaments.
- The glorious truth is that "*God is love*" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16) —yet it is nevertheless "*a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb. 10:31).
- God's wrath and His love are fixed and steady dispositions.
- He Himself says: "*I, the Lord, do not change*" (Mal. 3:6).
- With God "*there is no variation, or shifting shadow*" (Jas. 1:17).
- He is "*the same the same yesterday and today, yes and forever*" (Heb. 13:8).
- Nor do God's wrath and love imply any contradiction in His nature. "*He cannot deny Himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13).
- His wrath is not inconsistent with His love. Because He so completely loves what is true and right, He must hate all that is false and wrong.

Sin City

- Genesis 10:8–12 records that Nimrod founded the entire Babylonian kingdom, of which Nineveh was a part (cf. Mic. 5:6).
- Scripture makes reference to "*Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the Earth*" (Rev. 17:5).
- Nineveh represented the seat of this evil culture.
- Understandably, the Israelites hated Nineveh and all that the Assyrians represented.

A Reluctant Prophet and a Great Revival

- Commanded by God to go to Nineveh, Jonah boarded a ship in the Mediterranean—and headed the opposite direction! (Jonah 1:3).
- Have you ever noticed why Jonah attempted to flee Nineveh?
- This was the explanation he gave God: *"I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity"* (4:2).
- To this day history has never seen another awakening like what happened in Nineveh.
- The main point of the Book of Jonah (Jonah 4:6–11).
- The lesson God was teaching Jonah—and all Israel—was very clear. God is loving, merciful, patient, and compassionate toward sinners.
- *"When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it"* (Jonah 3:10).
- Does this imply some changeableness in God?
- Is that not a contradiction of Numbers 23:19: *"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"*
- Is that not a contradiction of Numbers 23:19: *"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"*
- Jonah 3:10 does not mean that God actually changed His mind. Quite the contrary; it was the Ninevites who changed.
- *"If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it"* (Jer. 18:8).
- Nothing can thwart, frustrate, or improve the perfect plan of God. *"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world"* (Acts 15:18, KJV).
- Throughout the Book of Jonah we see God at work in divine providence, sovereignly orchestrating all events in accordance with His eternal purposes.

- Romans 9 echoes the same idea: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.... Does not the potter have a right over the clay?"* (vv. 15, 21).
- And God was glorified in such a display of His great love for sinners.

God's Gift of Repentance

- The story of Nineveh give us insight into the very heart of God. It is His nature to love, to show mercy, and to have compassion.
- The revival was a miracle wrought by God. As Jonah himself testified, *"Salvation is of the Lord"* (Jonah 2:9).
- They turned from their wicked way (Jonah 3:10)—but it was God who turned them (Lam. 5:21, KJV: *"Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned"*).
- Paul wrote Timothy a bit of advice that would have been apropos to Jonah: *"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Tim. 2:24–25).
- The very act of the Ninevites' repentance was confirmation of the sovereign grace and loving mercy of God.
- Jesus cited Nineveh's repentance as a witness against His own generation: *"The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here"* (Matt. 12:41; Lk. 11:32).
- An entire generation of Ninevites was thus brought into the kingdom of God solely by His loving grace.
- Sadly, within a generation or so after this revival, Nineveh reverted to her old ways.
- That brings to mind a crucial truth about God's love and goodness. *"From everyone who has been given much shall much be required"* (Lk. 12:48).
- But God was not through with Nineveh. That wretched city, which had tasted so much of divine goodness only to spurn God Himself, was about to learn what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Stay tuned next month "And the Severity of God."