

May 18, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 3:16 (again).

1. Explain (as much as possible) all that is included in the concept that God “gave.”
2. How do we explain the term “begotten” being used for God the Son as it is found in some English translations?
3. In what ways, similar to the human experience, do God the Father and God the Son relate?
4. Why is it important to conclude that God the Father and God the Son are co-equal?

THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON

John 3:16

He was a militant non-believer, who summed up his world view with a verse from Lucretius: “Had God designed the world, it would not be a world so frail and faulty as we see.” So Jack turned his attention to academia, excelling in each field he studied. Soon the dons of Oxford took him in as a respected peer and he began to write and teach. Yet, far beneath the surface, his doubts were taking their toll. He described his mental state with words like “misery and hopelessness.” He said, “I maintained God did not exist. I was also angry with God for not existing.” Then two friends, also Oxford dons, JRR Tolkien and HVD Dyson, both devout followers of Christ, urged him to do something he'd surprisingly never done: read the Bible. So he did. Jack began to wrestle with the claims Christ made, concluding that He was either

deluded, deceptive, or the very One He claimed to be: the Son of God. On the evening of 19 September 1931, Jack and his two friends took a long walk through the Oxford campus. They talked late into the night. And Jack, C S 'Jack' Lewis, would later recall a rush of wind that caused the first leaf to fall – a sudden breeze, which possibly came to symbolize for him the Holy Spirit. Soon after that night, Lewis became a believer. The change revolutionized his world and consequently the worlds of millions of readers. Could it be this simple? Could the chasm between doubt and faith be spanned with Scripture and Christian fellowship? (www.wordfortoday.com.au/4/30/14.)

The changed life is that simple. Just trust what God said. Yes, but the plan that God designed for giving fallen sinners a new birth resulting in a changed life is not simple at all. On the surface it seems simple, but when we try to digest the idea of God becoming one of His created beings in order to buy us out of sin, our human finiteness bars the door of comprehension and prohibits us from entering. That is why the righteous person must live by faith. By faith, we tenaciously grasp this wonderful truth that God our Creator loves us so much that He Himself came to pay the price for redemption—a price we cannot begin to pay—so that we can become what He originally made humans to be.

God's Action.

God's action is portended by the opening phrase that God loved the world thusly. By way of quick review, we must remember from our last study that God loves His creation. In the process of concluding this truth, we learned in our last study that God is love. Love is one of God's defining traits. More than that, God defines love through His activity. From God we learn that genuine love, supreme love, God-kind-of-love is a conscience decision to do the very best for the object of love, even if it requires sacrifice. That definition might be somewhat broad based on our understanding of “best.” The opinion of what is best varies from person to person. That is true, but the “very best” from God's perspective is perfection—and we are talking about God's love. He Himself in all His perfect righteousness and glory is the unchanging standard of “best.” God created us to reflect that perfection. Sin changed all of that, marred our reflective abilities, and turned us into enemies of our Creator.

Therefore, God loves us fallen creatures so much that He determined to make the sacrifice that is required to return us to a perfect

state of reflecting His glory—for all eternity. It is an amazing love. In simple terms, John described this love for us by telling us that God loves His creation on *this* level. The little Greek word translated “so” might also be translated, “thusly.” We don’t use that word much in everyday conversation. It means that God loves His created beings “like this,” or “on this level,” or “to this extent.”

The next clause of this wonderful verse, “that He gave His only Son,” defines the extent of God’s love for us. God loves us so much that He gave. In keeping with our understanding that God’s love is demonstrated by sacrifice, we conclude that for God to give is for God to sacrifice. It was not simply that God had a disposition of love toward the fallen creation. Rather, because He loves, He did something about it. The word for *gave* speaks of action. The Greek word is *didomi* which means to cause to happen, to make, to give, or to produce. It does not require sacrifice, but if a sacrifice is involved, this verb can describe how it is made.

The fact of God’s sacrifice (is it really a sacrifice?), and the extent of the sacrifice is determined by God’s character. Since God is the One who *gave*, we measure the giving by Him or by His characteristics. He who creates by His word has endless resources and, therefore, the idea of “amount given” does not constitute sacrifice. He who is the perfectly sinless Creator is wholly justified to destroy the entire fallen creation and begin again. Because God would still be righteous if He destroyed the whole creation, the fact that He willingly gives whatever is necessary to restore the creation is a huge sacrifice. Even human wisdom would conclude regarding God’s desire to restore this mess, “Why bother?!” That God the perfect Creator would give, cause to happen, the price for redemption by providing Himself, is extreme sacrifice.

More than that, the same Greek word (*didomi*) means to provide. When God gave the “sacrifice” for redeeming the fallen creation, He also provided what no one or nothing in all creation can provide. When God gave the only Son as the sacrifice for sin, He provided what only He can provide. We who are part of the disaster, the utter failure, the fallen creation cannot possibly provide any means to undo that failure and make ourselves right with God. What would you offer the perfect and incomprehensible Creator to undo sin?

The boy had worked diligently in the neighbor’s flower bed pulling weeds. He worked through the heat of the afternoon and was rewarded

by the kind neighbor who gave him a \$10 bill. The boy felt rather proud of his accomplishment because ten bucks seemed like a lot money to him. As soon as he had the money in his pocket, he headed down the street to the general store to buy something he really wanted. However, along the way, he ran into a couple of his friends who were up to no good. They had a box of matches, and matches and curious boys are not a good combination. They snuck behind the church on the corner lot and began to light patches of grass, watch it burn, then stamp out the fire. Unfortunately, as they made larger and larger fires, one finally got out of control. The church caught fire and the boys ran for dear life.

It was a sad day in the community when the church burned to the ground. All was lost. The next day the boy with the \$10 was terribly convicted about his sin. When he could not stand it any longer, he took the money and ran down the street to where he found the very disappointed pastor surveying the rubble of what was once a beautiful building. The boy, with tears streaming down his cheeks, handed the pastor the \$10 bill and said, “Sir, I’m sorry for destroying your building. You can have my money to rebuild it.”

Our hearts are touched. We are glad that the boy was convicted about his sin. We are glad that he was willing to sacrifice his money to rebuild the destroyed building. But the fact is, \$10 wasn’t going to begin to meet the need. And that is a picture of us coming to God with all our righteous works and saying, “Sir, I’m sorry I destroyed your perfect creation. I’m sorry I have become your enemy because of my own sin. Here is my little bag of good works that will make it all better.” God and God alone must provide a covering for sin by what He alone is able to give.

God’s Gift.

God gave the one and only Son. This gift is God’s sacrifice because He loves us. But as we read that God gave His son, we must realize that Jesus Christ is not God’s son in the way humanity understands son-ship. We understand from experience what a father and son relationship is. In that experience, we know that the father begets a son through relations with his wife. It is a natural and expected result. Nothing shocking or unusual about that. The father rejoices at what he has brought into life. This of course would be an expected human

reaction not acknowledging that the child is a gift of God. As the child matures, the father trains the child, loves the child, and relates to the child. In that relationship, the father expects the child to submit and obey. For our hypothetical situation, we will assume that the child, being a model son, shows respect and obedience to his father.

This kind of relationship permeates our understanding so deeply that we, without thinking, attribute the same kind of relationship to God the Father and God the Son. But, to impose human limitation on the Divine relationship is to err. In the first place, God the Father did not beget God the Son. God the Father did not create God the Son. Jesus Christ is not the brother of Satan, who is another one of God's begotten beings (Mormon doctrine). Second, Jesus Christ is not merely a human, the product of a man/woman relationship, who happened to enjoy a special relationship with God. If the Son is the creation of God, He cannot provide the price for atonement. If He is merely human, there is no way possible for Him to provide the acceptable sacrifice for sin, because He Himself would be infected with the same sin principle with which all humans are born. Therefore, we cannot think of God the Son as though He was the little boy of God the Father who grew up to do great things.

At the same time, we understand that God does employ a picture of us humans being like His little children who He has begotten. He pictures the nation of Israel in a father/son relationship with Him. Isaiah declared, *Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?" (Isaiah 45:11)*. In a similar way, God also pictures those who trust Him as His children, another Father/son relationship. Jesus taught, *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11)*. We who trust God's Word and are born again, rejoice in the assurance the Holy Spirit gives that we are God's children. *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16)*. And so we look forward to sharing the inheritance with Christ. Paul taught concerning us who are God's children that *if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17)*.

But we are not sons of God like He is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God. While a human son of necessity must be younger than his father, this is not true of God the Son because He is eternally existent. If God exists forever in the second person of the Trinitarian Godhead, God the Son, why does this verse express that God the Son was begotten?

The word translated "begotten" in some English versions explains this seeming paradox. Consider the conclusion of the Nicene Creed adopted in the year 381: "We confess faith in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not created." Okay. How does that work? In human relations, a person is begotten through the process of sexual relations so that a person who did not exist before comes to exist. That is not the case with the "only begotten" Son of God. He is the *monogeneis* (according to the Greek text) – the unique Son. The word is used to describe an only child in a human relationship (Luke 7:12; 8:42). But the word is not used that way to describe the Son of God. Unlike a human child, God the Son was not brought into existence, even into an existence in relation to God the Father. Rather, He enjoys a unique status as the eternal Son of God.

The second member of the Godhead has always existed in a position characterized as "Son" though not fully explainable or understood as "son." Therefore, it is altogether fitting that the one who is "Son" should be begotten as a human "son" also. Of course the Son of God should be the member of the Trinity who should become incarnate, i.e. take on human form through birth to a woman. Also, in keeping with His position as Son of God, He was eternally obedient to God the Father. God the Son said of Himself, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38)*. Paul reiterated that relationship when he wrote, *"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3)*.

Because God the Son exercised the obedience that would be expected in a human father/son relationship, the world (including us) knows God. We know, according to John, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)*. John also affirmed, *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he*

has made him known (John 1:18). Therefore we are not surprised that Jesus stated, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). The Father/Son relationship does make us able to appreciate to some level the expression of sacrifice in God the Father giving the Son.

But because our understanding of the father/son relationship is truncated by our human finiteness, we cannot fathom the extent of sacrifice made when God the Father gave God the Son to pay the penalty for sin committed against Himself. God gave Himself. That is the astonishing truth rooted in God’s sacrifice because He loves His creation. How can that be? God the Son taught that He and God the Father are one. The apostle John introduced the Son with such words: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).* He made the same point in His first epistle: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us (1 John 1:1-2).* In the same vein, Jesus told Philip that if he had seen Him, he had seen the Father (John 14:9). And unless there might be some lingering doubt about the matter, Jesus plainly taught that He is equal to God the Father. “*And whoever sees me sees him who sent me*” (John 12:45). “*In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*” (John 14:20).

The Jewish leaders fully understood what Jesus claimed and used His statements as reasons why the Romans should execute Him. Before it came to that point Jesus had told them: “*I and the Father are one.*” *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” (John 10:30-32)* That was a bit shocking for them to hear. *The Jews answered Jesus, “We’re going to stone you to death, not for any good things you’ve done, but for dishonoring God.*

You claim to be God, although you’re only a man” (John 10:33 GWV). There is no alternative. The One and only Son had to be God.

This had to be the case because God alone is able to pay redemption’s price. The price must be paid because sin is the breach of God’s law. Sin is God’s created being stepping over the boundary established by God’s Law. We can illustrate the overstepping by any one or number of the “Big Ten” – doing what God forbids. Sin is also a matter of falling short of God’s standard of righteousness – not doing the kinds of things that God commands such as worshiping Him sincerely or loving Him with our full being. That aspect of sin is demonstrated by Satan deciding to be something God never intended for Him to be. It is manifested by Adam and Eve following Satan’s lead and desiring to have something God did not desire for them to have. In short, sin is refusing to trust God.

Sin is therefore an offense against God. It is the creature telling the Creator that He is wrong, or unfair, or unwise, or unconcerned. False accusation against an authority is always grievous. Falsely accusing the Holy God who has not, will not, cannot ever sin or be in error is grievous beyond comprehension. Therefore, no object of God’s creation can possibly provide a price or a covering or a means to do away with our offense against God. Only the perfect God can create the perfect sacrifice that will atone for offense against Him.

But how can God provide the covering for sin since He lives in perfection and cannot even be tempted to sin? It has to be true as James wrote, *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempts no one (James 1:13).* To provide the payment for sin’s offense, God would have to become like us who are tempted to sin continually. Indeed, Paul described that event when he wrote that . . . *Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).*

Yet, in order to be fit to offer the price required for redemption, God must not sin while in human form. We have that in Christ. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are,*

yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Because there was no part of creation or eternity apart from Himself that could provide redemption's price, God sent Himself in God the Son to redeem us from sin's curse.

God loves His creation so much that He Himself paid the price that is required to redeem the creation back to its original condition of perfection. That truth is most pointed when we realize that the chief object of God's love is humanity who He created in His own image to reflect His glory. This story of redemption through God's own sacrifice is the most amazing story of eternity. Hear it, believe it, accept it by faith, live it by faith.