

# Heavenly Love and Human Responsibility

John 3:16-21

**BI: God offers His saving love to all through the cross of Christ but salvation must be grasped by the hand of faith.**

For the past three weeks we have been learning about the complexities of the love of God as we have studied one of the most beloved text of all time - John 3:16. Spurgeon said that if you want to find peace and spiritual comfort in this life you should dive into the Godhead's deepest sea, and we have certainly done that in this study. But this morning I want us to come back up to the surface, as it were, and apply that deep rich theology to the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, that's what John 3:16 is all about, right?

As I understand this text, Jesus is offering three foundations truths about how faith fits into God's plan of salvation. First, Divine Love Calls For Saving Belief. Second, Divine Judgment is Owing to Unbelief. Third, Divine Insight Distinguishes Belief from Unbelief: (20-21)

## I. Divine Love Calls For Saving Belief: (16-17)

1. When all the dust clears from the theological debates over the complexities of the love of God, we come back to John 3:16 to discover that the message of this verse is still simple enough for a child to grasp. What Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand was that God's love is something greater than he ever imagined. It is not Israel alone that God loves. He loves the whole world and does not desire for any to perish but all to come to repentance.
2. How great is the love of God? The greatness of God's love can only be measured by the sacrifice that He made. "In this manner God loved the world; He gave His Son, the only One, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."
3. Now, it is important to notice an implicit truth in this text. Namely, that hanging over the head of every human being is the sword of God's just and holy judgment. That truth is so obvious and intuitive that Jesus makes no attempt to explain it.
4. Romans 1 tells us that everyone is born with the inherent knowledge that there is a God. Moreover, every man also understands that mankind is sinful. The only way to not accept these things, Paul says, is to suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). But if you don't suppress the truth about the existence of God and the sinfulness of man it becomes intuitive that man has a really big problem, because if there really is a God than we are answerable to Him. Some day we will have to give an account for how we lived. As the author of Hebrews say is, "It is appointed for man to die once and after that, judgment" (Heb. 9:27). But Jesus doesn't have to explain this because it is something Nicodemus (and all of us) already understand.
5. The main point Jesus wants Nicodemus to grasp, however, is that God doesn't hate the world - He loves the world! And because He loves the world, He doesn't want human beings to perish. He doesn't want us to face the terrible and eternal judgment our sin has earned. So what does His love compel Him to do? He does the only thing that could be done: He sends His only begotten Son to bear the full measure of the wrath we deserve. What's the goal? That we would not perish but have eternal life.
6. You see, the Jews thought that when Messiah came He would condemn the world; that is, He would come to Judge all the nations of the world that were not Israel. But they were mistaken. Look at verse 17: "For God did NOT send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the

world might be saved through Him. Jesus the Messiah came to earth on a rescue mission. He came NOT to conquer, but to save.

7. And by the way, isn't this perfectly consistent with what John says is the purpose of this gospel. John 20:31, "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life in His name."

8. So there we have it: The love of God moved the hand of God to send the Son of God to rescue sinners from the wrath of God. This is why Jesus came. But it doesn't mean everyone in the world will be saved. Nor does it mean that everyone in Israel would be saved, because in the middle of this declaration of the Love of God determined to bring sinners into eternal life, Jesus reveals a condition. Who will become the beneficiaries of God's saving love? Only those who believe in the Son. "Whoever *believes* in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

9. Someone will say, "Isn't that obvious?" Well, it wasn't obvious to the Jews. They thought salvation came by keeping the law. And it isn't obvious to modern Catholics. Their approach is based almost entirely on the O.T. ritualistic system. It's not obvious to the cults which each have its own system of works righteousness. It isn't obvious to Islam which has its own works-based approach to earning the favor of God. We may be overly familiar with the idea of believing in Jesus for salvation, but no one else in the world believes that. And Nicodemus certainly didn't believe that.

10. This was a shocking revelation. Jesus was essentially telling Nicodemus, "Everything you were ever taught about the way of salvation is wrong. Your seminary education is worthless. Your theological degrees aren't worth the paper they're printed on, and your own relationship with God is a sham. Furthermore, the only way you will ever be saved by believing in Me." That's pretty bold, wouldn't you say? But it was also the most loving thing Jesus could have said to Nicodemus; because Divine love requires saving belief.

11. From this point on, Jesus focuses on the difference between belief and unbelief. And the message Jesus communicates is that...

## **II. Divine Judgment is Owing to Unbelief: (18-19)**

1. Read 18-19

2. Let's remember what is going on here. Almighty, Creator God chose - in an act of unimaginable grace - to extend to sinners His love rather than His wrath. And how did He do that? He sent His only Son to die in their place. And those who embrace the Love of God by believing in His Son will escape eternal judgment. How good is that? But the truly amazing thing is that there isn't a stampede of sinners running to embrace the love of God! Why?

3. People do all kinds of ridiculous things in hopes earning a great reward. One time I watched as a number of men and women take turns laying in a Plexiglas box and having buckets full of giant south American roaches poured all over them in hopes winning a prize. Fat people will parade themselves on national TV trying to lose weight faster than other fat people in hopes of getting rich. Women will endure excruciating surgeries and life-threatening diets in an attempt to catch a husband. And none of these approaches come with any guarantee of success! So why, when God offers humanity the most valuable treasure in the universe free to all takers... why don't sinners stampede to get it?

4. The answer is in verse 19 (read).

5. The Light here is the same Light mentioned in chapter 1:5-9. It is none other than Jesus Christ. And why don't sinners run to the Light? It's because "men LOVE the darkness rather than the Light." In other words, unbelievers love the sin that leads to death rather than the Son who brings them life. Is it any wonder that they will be judged?

6. And the grim reality is that since they do not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God (v. 18) they are "already" under God's judgment. The perfect tense here indicates that they have entered into a continuing state of condemnation because they have refused to enter into a continuing state of belief. Because they have willfully rejected the most valuable gift offered by the most worthy Being in the universe, they now live under the condemning judgment of God

most worthy Being in the universe, they now live under the condemning judgment of God.

7. This is a frightening thing. We tend to think of judgment as a future state in the fires of hell, and that is certainly true. But here (as in other passages) we learn that the judgment of God on the unbelieving has already begun. Turn to Rom. 1:18.

“The wrath of God is revealed.” In what sense is the wrath of God revealed?

(24) God gave them over to lust...

(26) God gave them over to degrading passions...

(28) God gave them over to a depraved mind...

God’s wrath of abandonment.

8. This is the beginning of God’s judgment upon those who have spurned His love. “Judgment” is a familiar term in John’s “courtroom” vocabulary which includes such words as “testify,” “testimony,” “judgment,” and “verdict.” And “verdict” is what He has in mind in verse 19 when he says, “And this is the judgment (verdict). In other words, the judge has already weighed the evidence and has found them guilty. Guilty of what? Guilty of damnable unbelief.

9. What is the nature of the unbeliever’s crime? Robertson Nicole writes: “Not to perceive the glory of this august Being whom John so adored, not to receive the revelation made by the Only Begotten, is proof not merely of human infirmity and passion, but of wickedness chosen and preferred in the presence of revealed goodness”

10. “This is the verdict, that the Light has come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.” The only reason sinners don’t stampede to the cross of Christ is because they love their sin. They would rather lose the promise of eternal life than to lose their precious, beloved sin.

11. This is a frightening thing, isn’t it?; that humans are capable of being so in love with their pleasures that we become blind and insensitive to the perilous state we are in before the judgment bench of Almighty God. Unfortunately there are many religious people in the American church who are living under the condemnation of God and don’t even realize it.

12. Is it possible to know who those people are? John thinks so.

### **III. Divine Insight Distinguished Belief from Unbelief: (20-21)**

1. How can one discern whether or not they are a child of God? Read (20-21).

2. The distinguishing mark of an unbeliever (no matter how much he professes to know Jesus) is his life of blatant, un-repentant sin. Do you know someone who says they are a Christian and yet their private life is full of pornography, partying, sensuality, and other obvious sinful practices? Don’t be deceived. Paul said: (Gal. 5:19–21) “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

3. And this is perfectly consistent with what John wrote in 1 John 3:7-10 (Read).

4. You see, those who habitually practices evil, hates Christ no matter what they say. And they will not truly ever come to Christ on His terms because they do not want their evil deeds to be exposed and confronted. In other words, they love their sin more than they love Christ.

5. On the other hand (v. 21) whoever “practices the truth comes to the Light, so that His deeds may be manifest as being wrought in God.” In other word, true believers love to live in the light of Jesus Christ. Once you have truly come clean before the Judge and have received forgiveness and cleansing and have been brought into God’s family by unmerited adoption, you’re no longer afraid of the Light. You love the light! You want God to manifest the righteousness and holiness that He is producing in your life.

6. Do you remember how Paul talks about salvation in Ephesians 2:8-10 (read). You see, we are not saved By good works, but we are saved For good works. This is the good fruit of the Spirit that God produces in the lives of His children. We should not take that for granted.

that God graciously produces in the lives of His children. We don't boast about the things we do, but we take great delight in knowing that God loves to use us to set His glory on display for the world to see.

7. Here's how Jesus said it: (John 15:8) "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples."

8. So what about you, my friend. Do you see how much God loves you? He does not want you to perish. He doesn't want you to fall under the just condemnation of His wrath. He proved it by sending His only Son into the world to bear the wrath in your place and to become your salvation. Will you continue to love your sin more than you love God. Will you continue to reject God's gracious gift? Or will you today fly to the cross of Christ and find in Him forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, unfathomable joy, and eternal life.

BI: God offers His saving love to all through the cross of Christ but salvation must be grasped by the hand of faith.