

A Clear Presentation of the Gospel

John 3:16-21

John 3:16-21 - *“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. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

¹⁸ “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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Background Notes

The word “world” in verses 16, 17 & 19 is used in three different ways in the New Testament.

- a. “World” is used for the **material universe** that God created. Acts 17:24: *“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.”*
- b. “World” is used for the **evil satanic system** of values and attitudes that are contrary to God and His Word. 1 John 2:15-16: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”*
- c. “World” is used for the **world of mankind** - that is, the people of this world. This third way is how the word “world” is used in John 3:16-17. God so loved the world - the world of mankind, the world of people.

Another background note concerns the words *“only begotten,”* which are used in reference to Jesus Christ in verses 16 and 18. This phrase is also used of Jesus in John 1. This phrase does **not** mean that Jesus Christ had a “beginning.” Jesus Christ is God, and God is eternal. He did not have a beginning.

In English, the phrase “only begotten” sounds like Jesus Christ had a beginning, but that is not what the word means in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. In the Greek language, only one word, *monogenes*, is used. The Greek word *monogenes* speaks of the **unique relationship** between God the Father and God the Son.

Hebrews 11:17 tells us, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.” This same word, *monogenes*, is used of Isaac (the “only begotten” son) in reference to his relationship with Abraham (the father). But Isaac was not Abraham’s only son; Ishmael was also Abraham’s son. However, Isaac was the *monogenes* son, the son who had a unique relationship to Abraham. Isaac was the promised son, the chosen son, and the beloved son.

The relationship between God the Father and the Lord Jesus is unique. He is the eternal, beloved, one and only Son. His very nature is divine; He possesses every attribute of deity. He and the Father are One. He is the only begotten Son, the *monogenes* Son. In this phrase there is no idea that Jesus Christ had a “beginning.”

A final background note: “*that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (v16). In this verse, the word *perish* does not mean annihilation, but rather it means “come to ruin.” Unbelievers do not cease to exist when they die. They continue to exist, but they perish – they are lost forever.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The benefits of Christ's death are sufficient for all people, but they are only effective for some people.

“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” (v16). And verse 17 says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Question: If God loves the world of people, all people, so much that He sent His perfect Son to die for the sins of the whole world, doesn't it then follow that everyone is saved? If God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him, doesn't that sound like universal salvation? Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, so therefore isn't the whole world saved?

Answer: No. Verses 16-17 don't mean that the whole world is saved. Jesus **did** die for the sins of the whole world, but not everyone is saved. Although the benefits of Christ's death are **sufficient** for **all** people, the benefits are only **effective** for **some** people. They're only effective for those who believe! That's our doctrinal point. The work of Christ on the cross was universal in scope. The benefits are unlimited. Blanket payment for sin has been made. The benefits are sufficient to provide for all people - but they are only effective for those who believe: “*that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*”

Here's an illustration of this doctrinal point. Part of the cost of my graduate education was paid by the US government through the “GI Bill.” Under the GI Bill, anyone who had served in the military (a “GI”) could get a college education at government expense. The benefits were sufficient for all people who had served in the military. Blanket provision was made. Everyone who had served could have a college education. But - did everyone who had served get a college

education? No! Who received the college education? Only those who accepted the offer, and went to college! The government benefits were sufficient for everyone, but they were *only effective for those accepted the offer* and who went to college.

So the benefits of the work of Christ are sufficient for all, but those benefits are only effective for those who believe. The benefits of Christ's death are **sufficient** for **all** people, but they are only **effective** for **some** people.

2. The judgment of God is upon those in darkness who deliberately turn away from the Light.

“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”(v19-20).

Ever since the sinful fall of man in the Garden of Eden, people have been living in spiritual darkness. We are born into that spiritual darkness. But God didn't leave mankind stranded. Throughout human history, God has sent spiritual light into the world, and people have had an opportunity to respond to spiritual light. And with the coming of Christ, God sent spiritual Light into the world, in no uncertain terms!

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world - but most people turn away from the Light. Why? They turn away because they don't want their evil deeds to be exposed (v20). Most people prefer to remain in spiritual darkness because they don't want the Light to expose their sinful lives. They turn away from the Light, and that is what God judges. The judgment of God is upon those who deliberately turn away from the Light of the World.

Romans 1:18-20 says, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...”*

Notice - Romans 1:18 says unbelievers not only turn away from the truth - they actually **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness! That is, they not only turn away themselves, but they suppress or hold the truth down. They do their best to hide the truth from others!

Romans 1:20 says that the evidence for God is clearly seen, so those individuals who deliberately turn away from the Light are without excuse. Turning away from the Light is inexcusable! It's like being lost in a dark cave, and deliberately turning away from the lights of the rescue team. There's no excuse! Thus the judgment of God already rests upon those in darkness who deliberately turn away from the Light.

John 3:18 says, *“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.”* That’s like a drowning person refusing a life preserver that’s thrown to him. Notice - he is **already** drowning. He doesn’t start drowning at that point. If he refuses to grasp the life preserver, his only means of salvation, what more can the rescuer do?

In the same way, what more can God do to reach out to people who are already living in darkness? God has provided the Light and means of salvation, but people refuse His offer. And God will not violate a person’s free will. The judgment of God already rests upon those in darkness who deliberately turn away from the Light.

Practical Application

Are you moving toward the Light, or away from it?

“But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God”
(v21).

This is a practical application for believers as well as unbelievers.

If you are an unbeliever, you are either like most of the Pharisees - self-righteous, hypocritical, deliberately turning away from Jesus Christ, the Light. Or you’re like Nicodemus - a true seeker after spiritual truth, a sincere seeker of spiritual light. Nicodemus was moving toward the Light, and it resulted in his salvation.

If you’re a believer, you too are either moving toward the Light or away from the Light. When you became a Christian, you came out of spiritual darkness into God’s marvelous light. *“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”*
(1 Peter 2:9).

But right now you may be involved in some kind of sinful activity. If that is so, you’re moving away from the Light so your sin can stay hidden. You need to stop right now! Confess your sin, and start moving in the right direction - towards the Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

Are you moving toward the Light, or away from it?