



John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16-18 ESV)

Exegesis

Genre

This a passage from one of the Gospels. A Gospel is mostly narrative and biographical about Jesus but also shows how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament.

Translation

The table shows the “only Son” translations first followed by the “only begotten Son” translations.

| | |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| ESV | only Son |
| CSB | one and only Son |
| NIV | one and only Son |
| NASB | only begotten Son (Or <i>unique</i> , only one of His kind) |
| NKJV | only begotten Son |

- The translation “only begotten Son” is not the best.
- The CSB and NIV do a better job of emphasizing the uniqueness of the Son of God when they say, “one and only Son.”

Structure

[16] *For God* so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that *whoever believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life. [17] *For God* did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. [18] *Whoever believes in him* is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe* is condemned already, because *he has not believed* in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16-18 ESV)

Observations:

1. Verses 16 and 17 begin with “For God.”
2. Verses 16 and 17 have word *world* four times.
3. Verses 16 and 18 both contain the phrase “whoever believes in him.”
4. Verse 18 has “whoever does not believe” and “he has not believed.”
5. Verses 16-18 have four instances of a form of the word *believe*.



| Verse | Phrase |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16a | For God so loved the world |
| 16b | that he gave his only Son |
| 16c | that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life |
| 17a | For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world |
| 17b | but in order that the world might be saved through him |
| 18a | Whoever believes in him is not condemned |
| 18b | but whoever does not believe is condemned already |
| 18c | because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God |

Exegetical Outline

- I. God loved the world (verse 16a). He expressed this love by
 - A. Giving his only Son (verse 16b)
 1. Sent his Son into the world not to condemn (verse 17a)
 2. Sent his Son into the world for salvation (verse 17b)
 - B. Giving those who believe eternal life in his Son (verse 16c)
 1. Those who believe in the Son are not condemned (verse 18a)
 2. Those who do not believe remain under condemnation (verse 18b)
 - a. This is because of unbelief in God's only Son (verse 18c)

William Hendricksen structure for verse 16:

1. Verse 16 shows God's infinite love made manifest in an infinitely glorious manner. In this verse we see the following aspects of God's love.
 - a. Its character. "So loved" indicates God's love in action reaching back to eternity and coming to fruition in the cross.
 - b. Its author. "The God" in the original is the source of love.
 - c. Its object. "The world" indicates fallen man, both Jew and Gentile.
 - d. Its gift. "His Son, the only Son, he gave" in the original shows the Son is the supreme expression of God's love.
 - e. Its purpose. Those who receive the Son are transformed from death to life.¹

Purpose of John 3:16-18

The purpose of John 3:16-18 is to show God's active love for all nations through the sending of his Son in order to bring many from death to life through faith in the Son.

¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, New Testament Commentary (1953; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1:139-141.



Main message of John 3:16-18.

God's great love is demonstrated by his sending his Son so that those who believe in his Son will no longer be under condemnation but have eternal life.

Outline with message

- I. The reason for God acting in the world: God's love (verse 16a)
 - A. The gift from God: His only Son (verse 16b)
 1. The negative reason for the gift: Not to condemn (verse 17a)
 2. The positive reason for the gift: Salvation (verse 17b)
 - B. The gift received by faith through the Son: Eternal life (verse 16c)
 1. What is not received by faith through the Son: Condemnation (verse 18a)
 2. What is the continuing status of those who do not by faith receive the Son: Continuing condemnation (verse 18b)
 - a. What is the reason for continuing condemnation: Unbelief in God's only Son (verse 18c)

Word Studies

- The Greek word for *world* is *kosmos*.
- Some of the ways *kosmos* is used.
 - Refers to the physical planet. John 17:5
 - Refers to humanity as inhabitants of the earth. John 1:10
 - Refers to the general public. John 7:4
 - Refers to sinful humanity under judgment and in need of salvation. John 3:19
 - Refers to sinful humanity with the idea that no distinction is made with respect to race or nationality. In other words, Jews and Gentiles are included, that is, people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9). John 1:29
 - Refers to the realm of evil. This is similar to sinful humanity but in this case there is open hostility to God, Christ, and his people. John 7:7; 12:31; 1 John 2:15-17
- John 3:14-15
 - In light of verse 17 and verse 19 sinful humanity must be in view.
- Taking world to mean every sinful human being puts us in conflict with other teachings of Jesus in John and other passages in the Bible.
- The only meaning for *world* that makes sense and fits with the rest of Scripture is sinful humanity without respect to race or nationality, that is, Jews and Gentiles.

Context

- Discussion between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus.



- Jesus tells Nicodemus that a person must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Whoever doesn't just mean any Jew or Israelite. Whoever, means and Jew or any Gentile.
- Beyond John's Gospel there is the Great Commission in Matthew chapter 28 in which Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." We see the great multitude in Revelation 7:9 "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages."

Theology

Biblical Theology

- We are not looking forward to Jesus, we are considering the words and actions of Jesus himself.
- Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6; 17:4-5

- Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he is the one who brings the blessing promised to Abraham to the world.

Systematic Theology

Eschatology

- John 17:1-3

- Eternal life is intimate knowledge of the Father and the Son.

Missiology

- Jesus puts the focus on the world.

Practical Theology

- Jesus is telling Nicodemus, and by extension the Jews of his day, that God's love extends to all nations.

- A person, whether Jew or Gentile, can only find eternal life in the Son.

- God's saving love is experienced only in the person of Christ.

Conclusion

Remember the basic principles of bible study

1. Observe the text.



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2. Explain the text.
 3. Resist making your observations fit your theology.
 4. Make note of important details.

Remember that people were burned at the stake so we today could have our own copy of the Bible and study it for ourselves.