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## John 3:16-21 *For God so Loved the World!*

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Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** This is the passage that everyone seems to know, one that he or she will either love or hate, triumph or loathe, be convicted by or despise, adore or disgust. Just as it is with Christ—we either love Him or hate Him! But, whether we love or hate Him, serve Him or work against Him, Jesus did, in fact, come into this world to save us. God sent Him to us because of love—His love for us all. In so doing, this love cost the biggest payment ever conceivable, the death of His Son given for us. God did this so that we may not perish in our sins, rather be able by His Holy Spirit to receive Christ and experience His sacrifice that will pay for our salvation and eternity. All we have to do is believe, have faith, and trust Him. He did all the work; we just reach out and take hold of His miraculous grace, His wondrous work all for us! In fact, the main point and purpose of Jesus Christ's Person and work is not to condemn, but rather to save; not to punish but to inspire. When we realize this, we can trust Him, we can be saved, and He will not allow us to be condemned. Those whose faith is in Christ do not have to fear judgment or punishment because God's Light has conquered the darkness of our sins; Christ came into this world as the Light. But, beware; those who refuse Him, who love darkness and sin, and who fight against God and His people will be doomed and will have the full magnitude of fear and condemnation. So, see His love, receive His grace, throw off hate and worry, and put on His love, allowing His saving work to envelop and intervene deeply in you so you are truly and completely saved! By doing what He asks and loving it, you will have a better life—a marvelous life here and a wondrous eternity beyond measure or description!

### **Contexts and Background:**

This passage contains the quintessential Bible passage and summary of the Gospel Message that just about everyone knows and what people assume tells us what it means to be a Christian. This is all about who God is, One of Love, and what He does: He loves. This is His indispensable and primary attribute, but that is not just what God is about. Rather, it is a summary of all of His character, not just His one attribute. Love is one of His many characteristics and qualities. This is how His character and Person comes to us, how He loves by not waiting for us to come to Him, because we can't; rather, He comes to us. God demonstrated His ultimate Love by sending His Son as a sacrifice. His sacrifice included becoming a man, a suffering and dead man, for our benefit. Jesus came into a world that had already condemned itself and rejected God. We all are condemned for judgment because of sin and the refusal to accept God's way; we rejected Him, His self realization and law. Yet, Christ came to us who are undeserving, offering us His free grace if only we believe and trust in Him.

### **Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *God so loved.* This is a declaration of God's great and intense love and His motivation to be involved for humanity and give us unmerited salvation. This is counter cultural to Jews, both then and now, who believe they are the chosen ones and the Gentile world is outside of God's will and plan. God chose the Israelites to be His beacons and examples of faith to the world. The remedy for the main problem of humanity, which is our sinful nature, God solved through His Son's work of atonement (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:2, 16; Ex. 34: 6-7; Deut. 7:7-8; Judges 10:16; Psalm 136:1; Isa. 9:6; 16:11; 63:9; Jer. 48:36; Hos. 11:1-11; Matt. 5:44-45; John 1:14, 18; 6:32; 12:47; 2 Cor. 6:18; Rom. 8:32; 1 John 4:9-10; 5:20).
- *The world.* Meaning God is not limited; He also seeks those outside of His will who live to and for themselves. For Jews, this meant ones who were not Jews, but here God extends Himself to all peoples. God is not limited; His salvation is a certainty and forever. The saving power of Christ is not limited. A misconception of the Reformed faith is that we teach Christ's death is limited in its power and scope and thus can't save everyone. The fact is that both the Bible and Calvin did teach Christ's power is effective to save everyone, but not everyone will be saved. The elect means those to whom God's perfect choosing and love is given; those who do not receive it reject Christ by their will and pride and thus condemn themselves (Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

- *Gave his one and only/begotten Son.* Meaning special, unique, only one born, beyond measure, and dearly loved. Although we are all sons of God because He created us, Christ is God and unique. This echoes Abraham's love for his son Isaac and his willingness to trust God by his willingness to sacrifice the one thing that meant the most to him (John 1:14, 18; 1 John 4:9; Rom. 8:1-32; Rev 21:7).
- *Whoever believes.* This is not just mere intellectual belief, because even the demons know about God and Christ. This belief implies a commitment, a confidence and identification that leads to our trust and obedience, because we are bought by and belong to Christ so we do have real faith in Him. This is what produces our changed heart that leads to better choices and actions. This does not mean we will not have doubts or struggles; rather, we realize our place and purpose in Christ to have faith and fruit. The gift of grace is free; however, the condition is that we receive it to make it work, as any gift requires the receipt of it from the person to whom it is being delivered. Thus, the idea that God does it for everyone is true; God's Son's power, position, and effectuality to certainly save everyone is available, but not all will be saved, because the condition is that the gift is for those to whom the father gives Jesus (John 6:37-40; 10:14-18; 17:9).
- *Not perish.* The opposite of heaven is hell, a place where one resides away from God's love and light, away from eternal love and joy. This does not mean annihilation, that we are destroyed and deleted; rather, it is our destiny and what we all deserve. This can be avoided by our authentic conversion to Christ. We are saved by God's sacrificial gift of grace that we receive by our faith and trust. We do this not because we deserve it or earn it; rather, He gives it to us who are undeserving and ill-fitted for it.
- *Eternal life.* Meaning our life is timeless; we can have a good and purposeful life now even though our real life, for which we are made, is still to come in eternity. We possess His gift now and forever more so we have fellowship with God both here and now and also forever. We experience a glimpse of this as a Christian in a life of worship that glorifies God because we love Him back and trust Him for our life now. This resonates into eternity; our love for each other, God and us, is eternal (John 1:7; 10:28; 17:3).
- *Condemn.* This means judgment, and this will happen, but the point is that Christ's main mission is to save. He does not want to condemn nor does he delight with our bad choices; He hates sin and death, but because of our hardened pride, we will condemn our selves and bring judgment upon our selves. Only Christ can save. This also means that Jesus is not ready to judge at the time of this Gospel and this study's writing; His Second coming and Judgment day has not occurred (Ezek. 18:23-32; John 9:39; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).
- *Save the world.* This refers to those who are not Jews. This also means those who do not follow God's will. You can be a Jew and hate God. Being one of God's chosen does not guarantee salvation; one has to love and trust in God and live by faith, regardless of birthright or pedigree or education or experience or anything else.
- *Does not believe.* Meaning one resists God's love and offer of salvation and grace. The stubborn will and rebellion of a person is his/her own worst enemy; unbelief is the only basis for judgment and condemnation (John 1:18-32).
- *Name of God's one and only Son.* Meaning who and what Christ came to do. The instrument of our salvation is Christ's sacrificial life and death; the cross and the blood are the payment for our sins.
- *Verdict.* Meaning judged as the early Jews were when they disobeyed God and rejected His offer to redeem. We are already condemned because of original sin from Adam who represents us all; any one of us would have made that same choice and the sins we do now. Thus, the world, all of humanity that does not receive Christ, is in dire peril and under the threat of Judgment. Yet, the good news is Christ's salvation is available; only the people who refuse Him will be judged and condemned. Thus, we have no condemnation when we are in Christ (Num. 21:4-9; Matt. 23:37; John 5:24; Rom. 5:8; 8:1).

- *Light.* This means that God illuminates and gives salvation, and darkness leads to damnation. This also refers to God's purpose and love and the contrast to sin and worldliness that is darkness—the classic good versus evil, and the Good, God and His metaphor of Light, will win out.
- *Loved darkness.* Meaning people love to do what is wrong; it is fun, exciting, and alluring. The basis for the rejection of God's way is because we all prefer sin; we are naturally predetermined to gravitate to evil and only glimpse at good. Being in darkness means we have a worthless life; there is no meaning in life, no purpose, no contentment, no good motivation, and no real, effectual joy (Rom. 1:18-32; John 1:5-11; 1 John 1:6-7).
- *Exposed/reproved.* Meaning bringing to light; light exposes darkness; sin loves darkness and hates exposure. How does anyone who sins relate to being exposed, from the police officer pulling over a speeder to the person defrauding another to the proprietor of evil like pornography all being revealed? Why? We know it is wrong but refuse to acknowledge truth. Thus, we rationalize our sin, even adopt it as a preferred lifestyle and advocate it as a right and condemn anyone who opposes it. Be aware: yes Jesus will expose us; we can't ever hide from Him!
- *Lives by the truth/does what is true.* Meaning doing the Christian life rightly, acting rightly with faith, character, and in His True truth because we have been regenerated and now have His interests in mind and in our will. Our trust in Christ is what fuels our Christian living and allows us to experience His presence now, readying us for life now and getting us ready for Heaven. This means we have the Lord's interest in mind, knowing that His Way is best and seeking to do our best to abide and obey with our heart and mind and then with our actions. We trust in Christ and know He loves us and thus we can live a triumphant life. We do not just believe, but also act by will and practice to live for Him (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Eph. 2:10; 2 John 1-4; 3 John 1-4).
- *Comes into the light.* Meaning we can receive the gift of grace without the empowerment of God to reach and take it because Christ is the Light and the magnet. He gives us life and a plan; we just respond by faith
- *Seen plainly.* The contrast of light and darkness, truth and evil is clear. We are given the right to pick one, and with Christ's work and the Holy Spirit's empowerment, we can pick Truth and salvation and live by faith (John 5:29)!

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

The precepts in this passage are pure and simple. We have a God who goes out of His way to intercede in our wayward life to save us. The center of the Gospel is that Jesus beckons us, calls us, allures us, and seeks to persuade us to Him when we are unworthy of His attention, let alone His salvation. All because His prime directive is love and that means to love the unlovable—and the unlovable means you and me. The sad fact is that we are predetermined by our will, pride, and sometimes experiences and beliefs to reject His love. Yet, His love is offered. We seek to live our lives our way and not His Way, yet His love is there for us to grab hold of. He does not want us to perish or die or suffer; He wants us to have a good, joyful, and triumphant life! Jesus Christ came to save and to love, so why do so many of us spend all of our energy fighting Him? Why would we rather die in our vomit of unbelief and the darkness of our pride when we can have His Light for eternity? Why would we want to choose what is self-destructive and meaningless and toss out what is good for us and meaningful? Why do we want a bad life when we can have a good life?

The love we have to work with is conditional and provisional, but God's love has no limits or conditions—only that we receive it. Like any gift to be brought to a person, he/she has to reach out, open it, and use it to make it work. So it is with God's grace. Therefore, we are the ones who put conditions upon His most marvelous gift of love and grace! Remember: God's love is not the love of our feeble standards. His is real and effectual!

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. How did you first become interested in Jesus?
2. Why do you think that everyone seems to know this key passage, John 3:16? How does this inspire people to either love or hate Him? How can this passage be used to convict someone?
3. How do you feel that Jesus did, in fact, come into this world to save us and not punish us?
4. How would you describe the love of God from this passage? How did this love cost the biggest payment conceivable? How is sacrifice a form of ultimate love?
5. How does the fact that God sent Jesus, His Son, to die for you help you have faith and trust Him?
6. What does it take for most people to take hold of His miraculous grace? What did it take for you?
7. Why do you suppose that people tend to fight against God and His people instead of accepting this incredible gift?
8. How do you feel that people who reject Christ's offer of grace will be doomed and will be condemned? Is this fair? Is it fair that Jesus died for you who did not deserve His gift?
9. What did it take for you to see His love, receive His grace? What does it mean to you to put on His love? How does this help you throw off hate and worry?
10. How has Christianity helped you have a better life here on this earth? How does knowing what is in store for you in eternity help you have faith and joy now?
11. How does the fact that your life is timeless motivate you to have a good and purposeful life now? What can you do to be better beacons and examples of faith to the world?
12. Knowing that you will be having fellowship with God forever help you in your intimacy with Him here and now? How can you communicate this to others?