

John 18 – For God So Loved the World

06/30/2024

Scripture 1: (Jn. 3:16-18 ESV)

"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.

Scripture 2: (Gen. 15:1-6 ESV)

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Sermon:

This morning we shall delve into the most famous, beloved, and well known verse in the Bible, John 3:16. However, in many ways it is also the least well understood, by many.

Now I presume that the way most of us know it is as, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" (Jn. 3:16 KJG) because that is the way we learned it growing up; because if the King James was good enough for Paul, then it should be good enough for us, right? But really, it is the poetic language of the King James which preserves its place as many people's preference.

The King James, as translated from the Greek {Specifically the Textus Receptus (TR) which is the collection of Greek manuscripts gathered from the 11th-15th centuries used by Erasmus of Rotterdam for his "modern" translation. Unfortunately, with the documents being so "new" the TR is not considered as reliable of a source, when we now possess and use a larger number of earlier/older manuscripts. However, supporting our understanding of the preservation of Scripture, few significant deviations from these older copies have been found within the TR and those which have been identified are easily explained as scribal errors or additions (leading to the alleged controversies about "verses being removed from the Bible"), whereas none of these deviations are critically or uniquely used to support any Christian doctrine.}, provides the best, truest rendition of John's intended message and sense of this important verse. However, there are several minor differences in grammar which can be major issues for interpretation by their implications.

- For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. - ESV

- For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. - KJV

The first thing you should notice is the absence of the word “begotten” in the ESV text. Although it is missing, the same meaningful sense is still implied by the translation: this is the sense describing the “uniqueness” of Jesus as God's Son. The Greek term behind this is *monogenes*, a compound word comprising: “mono”, which means “one” and “genos” or “ginomai”, which means “to give birth” or “to beget”; this second term is also the source for our word “generation”. This term is special and we shall more deeply examine the uniqueness of Christ and the importance of *monogenes* for us at a later time.

The second thing you may notice is the subtle difference between “whoever” and “whosoever” *{pas o pisteuon}*. Ordinarily this would not be such a big deal because the two expressions are functionally the same, but depending on what you already believe concerning the doctrine of predestination (your presuppositions), when you read this you may try to claim support for either the Reformed, Calvinist view on election or that of the Arminians.

- The Reformed reader will understand it as, “whosoever **[is caused to]** believeth in him” and accept that the same understanding implied within “whoever believes in him”, because we believe that only God's chosen Elect will believe.
- Whereas, an Arminian reader will understand this as, “whosoever **[as in, whosoever might one day choose to]** believeth in him” and accept that “whoever believes in him” carries within itself an implied universal potential or contingent belief within every person.

So once again, English demonstrates itself to be an imprecise language. Since the opposing directions of these two understandings can be inferred from the verse when it is considered alone, we **need** to understand the wider context in order to determine which view is correct. That context more greatly affirms the Reformed view of sovereign election unto faith over a human freedom of will and choice to possess faith in Christ Jesus, as we began to see when we examined Moses' bronze serpent. If I were to offer editorial criticism to the translators, I would suggest that this part of the verse might be better and more plainly or clearly translated as, “all who are believing in him”, thus avoiding any implication as to the origin of belief. Thus this makes John 3:16 to be the **worst** possible proof-text on both sides of that debate.

The third difference I would like you to notice is “eternal life” vs “everlasting life” *{zoen aionion}*. While both terms are correct and appropriate, “everlasting life” is a more specific term while “eternal life” is more broad in scope. The difference between them and why the distinction is important, is twofold. First,

- God alone is eternal. There was no time when He is not. The LORD is, was, and ever shall be. He is the Creator.
- Whereas, the human soul and the human person were both created. There was a time when we were not. We are creatures.

We have a beginning, but God does not. Our hope is that, in Christ Jesus: through our being united into Him by faith and trust in Him; we shall then continue on and shall enjoy life unending.

Second, this distinction preserves a critical difference between the Creator and His creation: the difference of power and authority between us; a relationship defining difference. This difference reminds us that God chose to make us because He desires for us to be with Him and to enjoy Him, forever; that is why He made us.

My fourth and last point concerning the translation of this verse, is not readily apparent when reading. The King James has actually done a slight disservice as regards John 3:16, to every English translation that follows it.

Every version that I am aware of begins with the word “for”; a preposition, something you are never supposed to use at the start of a sentence {per the rules of English grammar}. It is a preposition that can carry a variety of meanings, but it usually serves to present the reason for a particular cause. Like “for”, the Greek term translated is “*gar*”; also a preposition which carries a cause-justifying meaning. So, if we disregard the historical and emotional influence of the King James, then this verse would be better translated, in its context as, “**because** God so loved the world...” and also be united to the prior sentence and always read together as one cohesive whole,

- “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.—~~For~~ because God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*” (Jn. 3:14-16 ESV)

Whereas, if this verse really did stand alone, independent from the surrounding context, since word order hardly matters in Greek, then it might be better reorganized and translated as:

- {God gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life, because He so loved the world.}

This rendition gives us a cause: “God gave”; an effect: “whoever believes...should not perish but have eternal life.”; and the reason: “He so loved”. God gave us Jesus to believe in, so that we could have eternal life, because He loves us. That would be a very simple and easy Gospel to accept, if that were all there is; but it is not. Alone it would justify “easy-believism” yet, considered alone, it ignores both: the Why God needed to give and What we should do now that we have received Him.

John 3:16 cannot stand alone. It must be considered with verses 14 and 15. When we considered them earlier, we saw that verses 14 and 15 described the “means”: through type and antetype; by which people could be saved, healed, and thus live.

Verse 14:

- “*As Moses lifted up the Serpent...so must the Son of Man be lifted up...*” - Cause

Verse 15:

- “*...that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.*” - Effect

Together these three verses tell one single, united but parallel tale of cause and effect, where the first explains the second; the type prepares us for the antetype. John 3:16 is not meant to stand alone.

Then we find the cause and effect repeated in Verse 16, with the “Why” between the two pairs:

- “*For [or because] God so loved the world...*” - Why
- “*...that He gave His only Son...*” - Cause
- “*...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*” - Effect

Now it is easier to see how these three verses are intended to work together rather than separately. They are like a Gospel Ore. So, together, what does they tell us?

- God gave up His Son to be looked upon in faith.
- God gave up His Son because He loves the world; His creation, even though it fell into sinfulness.
- God gave up His Son so that {those who believe}, His children of adoption through faith (1:12), would not perish but will enjoy life everlasting.

John 3:16 is really teaching us that:

- Eternal life is God's end goal for His Elect; everyone who is “born again” (the regenerate); for our salvation.
- Our salvation was effected through the work of God's Son, by Jesus being “*lifted up*” upon the cross.
- This effect is received as a gift from God through the faith given to us in our regeneration; by looking to, believing in, and believing through Him just as the ancient Israelites looked through Moses' bronze serpent to the LORD with faith (in *pisteuo*).
- This was all because “*God so loved the world...*”.

I know it sounds crazy but since the Holy Spirit says it, it must work; yet, how?

- To better understand how we receive eternal life by believing in Jesus, we need to look back to Abraham.
- We must look back to Abraham to understand how **active faith** is the operative means of our salvation.

Considering the cross, we look back to Abraham and the covenant of grace which the LORD made with him. God made a covenant with him, for him but, God also made it for Abraham's offspring, his descendants according to God's promise (Genesis 15, 17) with Abraham as the covenant mediator. He received this promise of grace for us as our federal head {much as Adam was our covenant mediator and federal head when he received and then violated God's covenant of works and condemned us to sin, misery, and death}.

“...the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

God spoke very broadly to Abraham {although he was still called Abram at this time} in His revelation of the promise of grace, making three distinct and obvious promises.

- The first was that his “*reward shall be very great.*”; a non-specific promise, subject to interpretation {yet always to Abraham's good according to the LORD's decree}.
- The second was that he would have a legitimate heir, a son, to continue on after his life was ended.
- The third was that through this son, Abraham would become the patriarch of a vast and great people.

These promises were first fulfilled very specifically and distinctly in Abraham's near present:

- Abraham became an exceptionally wealthy man. He enjoyed prosperity according to the LORD's providence and it was received by his heir, Isaac.
- Isaac was the son of Abraham's old age and of his post-menopausal wife, Sarah (as the “way of women had ceased” with her; Gen 18:11). He was the born according to the promise of God (Genesis 17). Not only did he have a son, he actually had eight sons, but we only ordinarily talk about the first two: Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 25:1-2); because only Isaac was Abraham's legitimate heir, as the son of his principal wife, Sarah. According to ANE culture and practice, although Hagar was Sarah's servant, once she was “given” to Abraham and more particularly after she gave birth to Ishmael, she was technically elevated to the status of “wife”; still subordinate to Sarah, but socially favored as the mother of the eldest son hence the conflict described in Genesis 21}.
- Through his eight sons, but especially through Isaac first and then Jacob second, Abraham's descendants became a great people, as numerous as the stars.

But, as with many biblical prophecies, these promises also have a later and greater fulfillment. Just as the bronze serpent was a prototype to the antetype of the cross, so too the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham was a prototype of the greater fulfillment of God's promise to Jesus Christ.

- Jesus is, as Paul explains in Galatians 3 and Romans 4, the “offspring” and “heir” of Abraham; the child of God's promise; the Son of God, the Son of David, and the Son of Man.
- Through our faith in Jesus, we are adopted to be God's children with Him (John 1:12) as the Church. We are more numerous than the stars and our number includes people from all the world. The Church contains people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and family throughout the past, present, and all of future history. We are a faithful remnant pulled from out of the world, the *kosmos*, and drawn into the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus is the “*heir of all things*” (Hebrews 1:2). He has received and shall yet receive a far greater reward than Abraham ever imagined: a Kingdom without end, Glory, and a family bound by love (love for one another **and** love for the LORD our Father). So, as His brothers and sisters, we are made His fellow heirs in God's promise of grace (Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 3:6; James 2:5; 1 Peter 3:7).

Yet that still does not address the “How”. That described God's promise, while the verses following after describe the covenant making process; where God affirms what He shall do for Abraham and his offspring by an oath, so that he shall know that God will keep His word (Gen 15:8). A theophany of God, appearing as a firepot, passed between the twin halves of Abraham's sacrifices and called the curse for breaking covenant to Himself.

How did Abraham receive his reward? How did he receive the benefit of God's promise? How did the Israelites receive healing from their venomous snakebites in the wilderness? How do we receive eternal life?

The same way that Abraham did. Moses writes, “*And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*”. Abraham “*believed the LORD*”; Abraham believed it and he “got it”.

But there is something you should know about his believing because there is an important implication we miss. While the Greek translation uses the verb *pisteuo* as we should expect, the **original Hebrew** verb translated here is the word, *amen* {hiphil, 3rd person, perfect, masculine, singular}.

AMEN. Yes, **that** AMEN. Amen is not just a word to say conclude our prayers, it carries an important depth of meaning. Whenever we say “AMEN”, we actually say more about and we say it very actively.

When Moses tells us that Abraham “AMEN'd” the LORD when he heard God's promise, he says that Abraham:

- was **convinced** by God's promise;
- **affirmed** the truth of God's promise;
- **trusted** in God's promise;
- had **confidence** in God's promise;
- **believed** the LORD.

Whenever we read Jesus saying, “*Truly, truly I say to you...*” (as John 1:51), we are reading a translation of *amen amen lego ymin*; therefore, we understand that Jesus is telling us:

- to be convinced by;
- to affirm this as the truth;
- to trust in;
- to have confidence in; and
- to believe whatever He says next.

Abraham took God's promise “to the bank” and Jesus also tells us that we can take His Word “to the bank”.

But how do we get from “righteousness” to “eternal life”? What is the connection?

Both Moses and John are talking about the righteousness which leads to life: a perfect righteousness through perfect obedience to God's command.

- Remember, the LORD promised Adam “life” upon condition of his obedience: that is the covenant of works, which at that time only carried one single stipulation, “...*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” (Gen. 2:17 ESV). Keep the LORD's law and live, or disobey and die. {This is why we consider (mediated through Paul in Galatians) the covenant of works to be a probationary covenant. If Adam had remained faithful and obedient, thus being righteous, then there would have been no Fall, no corruption of our nature into sinfulness and no one would have been doomed to die or be subject to divine judgment or justice.}
- Moses affirmed that those who are obedient to God's Law receive the benefit of life, “*Therefore **choose life**, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is **your life and length of days**, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.*” (Deut. 30:19-20 ESV).
- King Solomon also commended obedience to God's Torah in his proverbs, “*My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.*” (Prov. 7:1-3 ESV).
- Most importantly, the prophet Habakkuk proclaimed the LORD's intention, “...*but the righteous shall live by his faith.*” (Hab. 2:4 ESV); a thread carried onward by Paul in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11.

So, righteousness leads to life. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the cause by which all who are “born again” shall live, the effect, and we may only receive it through faith in Him.

But, how do we receive it? How do we get this free gift of God's grace and mercy?

Since regeneration, our being born again, **is not** a consequence of our actions but **is** the sole sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit who performed our “heart transplant” surgery and gave us this faith, our believing also cannot be the work through which we are made righteous; therefore, eternal life also can only come through the sole sovereign work of God; meaning God “does” while we are “done to”.

As with Abraham, so too with us. “[God] **counted it to him as righteousness.**”. God:

- credited it to him;
- reckoned it unto him;
- assigned it to him;
- imputed it to him.

The answer to the question of “How do we get eternal life?” that we have been trying to answer is “imputation”. God does it **for** us and He does it **to** us, leaving us to respond faithfully afterwards.

- God the Son, Jesus Christ, lived righteously and earned righteousness.
- God the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to believe in Jesus, through our regeneration.
- God the Father counts the righteousness of Christ as ours.

The LORD imputed the righteousness of Christ to Abraham because of His faith in the LORD. He was given righteousness unto life and so this same righteousness is imputed to “*whosoever believes in him*”. Through our faith in Christ, God imputes Jesus' righteous obedience to us along with His eternal, resurrection life while God also imputes all of our sin and wickedness to Him, so that we can be washed clean and forgiven.

We call this the “divine transaction”: a spiritual accounting where righteousness is first debited from Jesus' **infinite** account and then credited against our deficit, while our wickedness is debited from our account and credited against His surplus, thus making “...*him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” (2 Cor. 5:21 ESV).

So, when we say that “[God] gave his only Son...”, this is what we mean: Jesus was born to live righteously for us and He died upon that cross for us as “...*the propitiation for our sins.*” (1 Jn. 4:10 ESV), as a sacrifice of atonement to justly put our sin to death and so that we may justly live (Rom 6:10).

{It would be merciful for the LORD to forgive us for our sins, but without a resolution or consequence (satisfaction) for those same sins, then it would not be just. God is both merciful and just. He is never unjust, nor does He engage in injustice. Therefore, in order to atone for sin, someone (some human person) needed to suffer the punishment and consequences due for sin.

However, God does not wickedly inflict the justice due to us upon Jesus. He volunteered, He submitted to the divine will (of which He is a part) so that we would be free, so that the LORD could give us to Him and so that none of us would ever be lost.}

Even still, although we stand to gain such a great benefit from this, our human minds reel at the thought of this and our whole reason still screams out “**Why?!?**”. Why would God, why would Jesus willingly suffer and die for sinners like us? “Why?” is the worst question for us to ever ask about Scripture and the mysteries of God since the LORD rarely reveals His reasons, but this is one time when He does.

- “*BECAUSE God so loved the world...*”

The LORD gave us His Son because He *agape'd*, the world. He loves us self-sacrificially and gives Himself to us, as God the Son, and gave up Himself, as God the Son.

- God the Father, in giving us God the Son, cost the Father His Son.

This is the something often and easily forgotten by Christians.

- God has bought us from Himself, for Himself, and He paid the highest price possible: Himself. “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.*” (1 Cor. 6:19-20 ESV).

Therefore, since each and every person is valuable to God, we ought to consider everyone just as valuable. Nobody is worthless. This drives our love for neighbor: loving them as the image of God and loving because they are loved by God. Furthermore, since we cannot know whether someone is belonging to Christ, if we are to live in obedience, then we must act as though everyone is because, you do not know whether the kindness and love that you show them, in Jesus' Name, will be what God uses to draw them to Himself.

This is the Gospel that should drive our lives. God's sacrificial love for us inspires us to respond to His mercy by sacrificially loving others, all “[*because*] *God so loved the world...*” **first**.

Therefore:

- because “*God so loved the world*”, He made promises to Abraham, for Christ and for us;
- because “*God so loved the world*”, He delivered a people from bondage in Egypt and from sin;
- because “*God so loved the world*”, He gave us His Holy Law, His Torah, so that we would recognize our sinfulness and become obedient to it;
- because “*God so loved the world*”, He gave the Israelites a bronze serpent to look through to Him in faith, so that we could know to look to God when we see the “*Son of Man lifted up*”;
- because “*God so loved the world*” He gave His righteous Son to stand in the place of sinful humanity from across the whole *kosmos*, His elect children of adoption.

Therefore, we look to Him in faith: by placing all of our hope and confidence in Him alone. We surrender our self-righteous, self-confidence and self-reliance because there is no hope in ourselves. We trust Him and say “AMEN” to His promises because He gives us the life eternal, just as He gives us the faith to believe.

Therefore, because God loves us and since God brings us to Himself by giving us life in Christ Jesus, His Son, now we shall respond to His grace and mercy with love, in love. All Christians are evangelists to the world, proclaiming through word and deed, that “Jesus loves you and that God wants what is best for you. So turn to Him in faith. Repent of your sin. Believe Him and then obey Him. Then you shall be, “... *like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.*” (Ps. 1:3 ESV) and {In all that you do, you shall prosper} for God's glory and your own good.

AMEN