

A LOVE FOR THE SOULS OF MEN**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

Perhaps one of the most familiar and most often quoted Bible verses is John 3:16. The verse says, *“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.”* Consider this verse from God’s perspective. God created man in his own image and after his own likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). God is the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9), not just of *“the spirits of just men made perfect”* (Hebrews 12:23) but *“the God of the spirits of all flesh”* (Numbers 16:22; 27:16). His love for the creatures made in his image is greater than his creatures can fathom. The Psalmist declared, *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?”* (Psalm 8:3-4). God’s love for man is so great that even though he is so pure and holy that he cannot look upon evil and iniquity (Habakkuk) 1:13), yet he has commended his love toward a lost humanity. Paul wrote, *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). Many people wrongly insist that because of God’s great love he could never punish them for their sins. Be not mistaken, God will by no means clear guilty sinners. The Psalms say, *“The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity,”* and *“God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day”* (Psalm 5:5; 7:11). Moses wrote that God is *“keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation”* (Exodus 34:7). The context bears out that God is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6). And, God will not “clear the guilty,” but he will pardon iniquity and sin (Exodus 34:8-9).

Men trying to be holy and trying to imitate Christ find sin repulsive. Often the mistake is made of desiring the punishment of God to be brought down upon the wicked because there is no argument but that they really deserve it. James and John once thought this way as recorded in Luke 9:51-56, *“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”* John 3:16 needs to be considered from God’s perspective if “a love for the souls of men” is ever to be cultivated strongly enough for Christians to give of their time, their talents, and their treasure to win them.

**Time**

Think of the time God has invested in the interest of wicked, sinful men to bring about their salvation. Before time began, God purposed to bring his Son into the world to save the lost. Paul wrote, *“According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Ephesians 3:11). The twenty-five hundred years of the Patriarchal period of Old Testament history and the fifteen hundred years of the Mosaic period of Old Testament history were designed to serve as a *“schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Galatians 3:24). He remains *“longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (II Peter 3:9). God gave and is continuing to give time which shows “a love for the souls of men.”

*“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...”* (Amos 7:8)

One test of the Christian which shows whether or nor he loves God and the souls of men is the use made of time. The apostle Matthew wrote, "*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy hearts, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*" (Matthew 22:37). Heart, soul, and mind is a description of the eternal part of man. "All" is a quantitative word expressive of the degree of love God requires from those who serve him. Christians need to cultivate to a greater degree their love for God and for the souls of men.

### **Talent**

The ability and wisdom God displayed in providing the plan of salvation is so marvelous the prophets and even the angels desire to investigate it. Peter wrote, "*Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into*" (I Peter 1:10-12). Talent in the form of the wisdom of God in saving man exceeds man's comprehension and can only find expression as God has revealed his will to man. Paul said, "*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

Christians have different ability levels. Paul described it in I Corinthians 12 as the body of Christ or the church of Christ having many members yet not all of them having the same use or function. However, each member is expected to perform to the best of his talent level or ability. Paul said, "*So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also*" (Romans 1:15). The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also teaches personal responsibility and accountability for doing the will of God. What the Christian does with the talent God has give him mirrors the love he has for God and the souls of men.

### **Treasure**

Heaven was undeniably robbed of its richest treasure when Christ left the celestial regions to enter the world as a babe in Bethlehem. Yet, Philippians 2:6-7 says, "*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*" "God gave."

John 3:16 viewed from the perspective of God means giving, and following the example God set it means giving that which is nearest and dearest to the heart. Since God gave his Son, man should not hesitate or question to give his best in return. There are two parts to the presentation of the gospel: sending and going. Paul write, "*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*" (Romans 10:14-15). While everyone cannot preach and teach (James 3:1), all must be ready to give an answer of the hope within (I Peter 3:15). And, all are instructed to support the preaching and teaching of the word of God to the salvation of the souls of men everywhere (I Corinthians 16:1-2). God expects Christians to give their earthly treasures to enrich heaven with the souls of men, one of which is worth more than the whole world (Matthew 16:26).

When John 3:16 is viewed from the perspective of God, Christians will rightly see themselves as instruments of God's will to be used in getting the soul saving message of the gospel of Christ into the hearts and minds of lost and dying men and women. The Savior said, "*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*" (John 3:16).

-Gary McDade

### **THE EFFECT OF NEGLECT**

We often fail to consider the gradual cumulative effect of sin in our lives. In Saint Louis in 1984, an unemployed woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home. Since there were only a few, she made no effort to deal with them. Over the summer the bees continued to fly in and out the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned, unaware of the growing city of bees.

The whole attic became a hive, and the ceiling of the second floor bedroom finally caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey and thousands of angry bees. While the woman escaped serious injury, she was unable to repair the damage of her accumulated neglect.

**THINK ABOUT IT...**

- ...people are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway!
  - ...if you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway!
  - ...if you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Do good anyway!
  - ...honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway!
  - ...the biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest minds. Think big anyway!
  - ...people really need help, but they may attack you if you help them. Help people anyway!
  - ...give the world your best, and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the best you've got anyway!
- "Let all your thinks be done with charity" (I Corinthians 16:14).*

**FROM THE MOUTH OF BABES**

Mother—"The sermon was too long."

Dad—"The seats were too hard."

Sister—"The singing was terrible."

Little Johnny; who had seen what his dad dropped in the collection plate—"I think it was pretty good; we got in for a dollar."

*"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7).*

**TOP TEN INDICATIONS YOU ARE NOT READING THE BIBLE ENOUGH**

1. The preacher announces that the sermon is from Genesis and you check the table of contents.
2. You think Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had a few hits in the '60s but never really amounted to much.
3. You turn to Psalms and a WWII savings bond falls out.
4. When someone asks your favorite Old Testament character, you say Hercules.
5. Your favorite Bible verse, "Cleanliness is next to godliness."
6. You get mad because you can't find Charlton Heston in the concordance nor in the table of contents.
7. Catching the kids reading the Song of Solomon, you demand, "Who gave you this?"
8. You wonder why Revelation has a letter written to the capital of Pennsylvania.
9. You fall for it when the preacher tells you to turn to Hezekiah 2.
10. You think that Job rhymes with Bob.

*"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

**MRS. JONES, DO YOU KNOW ME?**

A small town prosecuting attorney called his first witness to the stand in a trial—a grandmotherly, elderly woman. He approached her and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?"

She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a rising big shot when you haven't the brains to realize you never will amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you."

The lawyer was stunned. Now knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?"

She again replied, "Why, yes, I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby sit him for his parents. And he, too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted, and he has a drinking problem. The man can't build a normal relationship with anyone, and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him."

At this point, the judge rapped for silence and called both counselors to the bench. In a quiet voice, he said with menace, "If either of you asks her if she knows me, you'll be in jail for contempt within five minutes."

It is frightening to think of someone knowing (and sharing everything there is to know about us! In the book of Revelation, seven letters are sent from Jesus Christ to seven churches in Asia Minor. Each of the letters begins with the same words: "*I know thy works*" (Revelation 2:2).

It is a sobering thought to know that as we stand before the great Judge, there is one who knows all about us. May that knowledge serve to motivate us to live righteous lives.

*"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).*