

A LOVE FOR THE SOULS OF MEN

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 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, 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.”*

One test of the Christian which shows whether or not he loves God and the souls of

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

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

IF IT DON'T ALIGN, DECLINE

Text: _____

I. Does my _____ Align? If not decline.

Notes:

II. Does my _____ Align? If not decline.

Notes:

III. Does my _____ Align? If not decline.

Notes:

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 heart, 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 in 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 given him mirrors the love he has for God and the souls of men.

TREASURE

Heaven was undeniably robbed of its riches 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 have 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 wrote,

“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

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH LIFE

As spring has sprung, many things are present that remind us of many things that are right with life. Flowers are blooming, days are warming, trees are greening, and the smell of freshly mowed grass is a constant companion. But then there's baseball. Baseball takes us back to a time when life was less complicated because for nine short innings the cares of the world can be pushed to the side. Nobody worries about the economy, the strains of our jobs are pushed far from our minds, and all that matters is the purity of the game. It takes us back to our childhood when dreams were blossoming and imaginations were running wild. Yes, baseball, the all-American sport, can remind us everything that's right with life.

However, kind of like sin, baseball can only be enjoyed for a season. And then, sure, there are other things that come and can help us to get through life on a daily basis; but is there not something that in and of itself, and more than anything else, can bring peace to our lives? Absolutely, because God has provided a way of life called Christianity that is the ultimate, daily reminder of what can be, and is right with life. New Testament Christianity, by design, is perfect because it is designed by God. And it is New Testament Christianity that not only reminds but represents everything that is right with life. How, though, does Christianity symbolize what's right with life and how it can change not only lives but the world as a whole?

First, Christianity represents what's right with life because it represents the means by which we enjoy fellowship with God. As sad as it may be, this fact may be the single most unappreciated blessing of all those available to the child of God. Man can and must have a relationship with God, and that relationship is only available in Christ. And what is even greater news than we can have a relationship with God is that God wants us to be in fellowship with Him. *"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"* (I Corinthians 1:9). We know that God desires our fellowship because it came at such a high price to Him. Desiring for us to be in fellowship with Him so much, He was willing to give His only begotten Son to provide the means of entrance (John 3:16). And it is that fellowship that ultimately will reach into eternity as we enjoy being in His presence forevermore. As the timeless words of the old hymn Amazing Grace say, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

Second, Christianity represents what's right with life because it provides the ability to regain innocence that has been lost. Man was created pure and then fell (Genesis 1-3). That pattern has not changed since the beginning, because man is still born pure, but then grows to eventually forsake God in sin (Romans 3:23). Contrary to the belief of most of the world, though, that innocence can be found once more in Christ. The Hebrews writer stated such by writing, *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"* (Hebrews 8:12). Imagine the opportunity to start all over with a clean slate. That is something every soul in this world dreams of, but unknown to many it is something every soul in this world can have. Through the blood of Christ our souls can be washed whiter than snow and give us a new beginning because we are new creatures (II Corinthians 5:17). However, let it be clearly seen, that such a promise is available only in Christ where life can be made right.

Then third, Christianity represents what's right with life because it represents a better way of living. It has been said before that even if there was no God and Christianity was but a hoax, the Christian life would still be better because it makes us better husbands or wives, children, employers or employees, and friends. That, I believe is absolutely true; but what is even greater is that there is a God and Christianity is not a hoax, and we can still be better than we otherwise would! There is a reason Peter's list in I Peter 1:5-11 is called the Christian "Graces." They provide a standard of living that is ideal in every sense of the word, and they epitomize what Christianity is all about. The Christian life is an abundant life. No we may not have all of the things of this world we want, but we will always have all the things of God we need. Christianity is indeed a better way of life.

The eternal pessimists of this world will always conclude that nothing is right with this life. There is no joy, fullness, or even satisfaction. The Christian knows better because he knows that in Christ all things are right. Must we tolerate the evils of this world? Yes, but just for a while. Because at some point in the future this world along with its troubles will be gone, and what will be left for every faithful child of God will be not a better life, but the best life which is eternal.

-Andy Brewer