

Special Study: John 3:16

It's been called the Golden text of the Bible, the Gospel in one verse, the summation of God's plan for man. It is held up for the cameras to see at sporting events. It is one of the first verses ever memorized, as well as considered to be the most quoted verse in all the Bible.

What is so significant about this verse? It is well worth our time to consider this great text one word at a time.

FOR- (gar) this gives the reason for the statement in v. 15. The force of the Greek *ina* (*ina??* translated "in order that" to begin verse 15 ties together the "lifting up" of the son of man "in order that" or for the purpose that those (literally "all") who believe in him might have eternal life.

GOD - (O qeoV) is the subject of the sentence. Therefore, this is a verse about God. It is focusing on what God has done.

SO - (Gk. OutwV - outos) - means "in this manner" or "in this way." It is telling (a) how God loved the world as well as (b) the degree of His love - cf. 1 Jn. 3:1, 16. God must really love us to do this for us.

LOVED - (Gk. hgaphsen - agapasen - is a key word in John, occurring 43 times). This is love given without return (1 Jn. 4:9,10). It is love given while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). Who loved? God loved. This verse is a statement about His love.

THE WORLD - (ton kosmon) is the direct object of God's love. The "world" in Greek is kosmov - a word which occurs 77 times in the Gospel). In John "the world" is that group of persons who have no fellowship with God (Jn. 1:10,29; 3:17; 12:31; 15:19; cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17). **This is God reaching out to the unlovable.**

Why would you and I be considered unlovable? Because of sin.
Sin makes us impure and unholy.

THAT - (Greek wste - hoste see note on "for" above for connect of this with verse 15) - This is the result of God's love (1 Jn. 3:8).
Because He loved He did something about it. He does not love without action.

HE GAVE - (edwken - edoken) This is love in action. (1 Jn. 3:16; 4:9,10). Giving is always a solid proof of love (e.g. Jn. 15:13). God had no obligation to give. Therefore, the fact that He did give ought to underscore and emphasize the degree of His love. There can be no greater gift than what God gave.

HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON - (ton uion ton monogenh - ton huion ton monogena The only one of his kind; unique, special (Jn. 1:14, 18; 8:31,32). It isn't that God had no real attachment to His gift. It was His son and He only had one son.

THAT - (ina - hina) Sometimes translated "**in order that**" - showing **purpose and intent**. This is the reason God loved and gave. He had a specific purpose in mind (cf. 1 Pet. 1:17-21).

WHOSOEVER - (paV - pas) **This word means all men and women everywhere.** It doesn't exclude poor, or include only the middle class. It does not exclude a certain race, gender, people like us, etc. **The word is all inclusive** (cf. Acts 17:30). If God was going to give such a precious gift, then it was going to have the greatest impact possible. He did this with people in mind - people like us. It is remarkable to even fathom that God would do this to save a person like you or me.

BELIEVETH - (O pisteuwn - Ho pisteuon) **This word describes a way of life. It includes receiving Jesus (Jn. 1:12) as well as obedience (Jn. 3:36). It is continuing action,** meaning that one must continue to believe (cf. Jn. 20:30, 31).

It cannot be said that one truly "believes" if they do not follow what Jesus taught. For example, He taught that one must be born again (Jn. 3:3, 5). **If one is not baptized, then that one does not believe.**

ON HIM - (eiV auton - eis auton) That is, on Jesus. We must believe in Jesus or be lost. **Morality or sincerity is not sufficient.** Other religions are useless. Jesus is the exclusive way to eternal life (cf. Jn. 14:6; 1 Cor. 3:11). Is that hard? Inflexible? Yes! But it is God's plan. And, it is God's plan for the world.

SHOULD NOT PERISH - Perish (Gk. - apolhtai - apolatai) means to be separate from God and His salvation (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7-10). It is losing all that is good. It is the opposite of "eternal life." Think of the two alternatives. Perishing is too awful for our comprehension. Believing is sensible and logical. So why do so many choose not to believe?

The verb "perish" provides the contrast to salvation. It is used of death as opposed to life (Mark 3:6), "destroy" as opposed to preserve (1 Cor. 1:19), "loss" as opposed to win or gain (2 John 8). Matthew uses this to refer to sheep that have gone astray (Matt. 10:6), Luke to a son who has wandered from his father's house (Luke 15:24). John duplicates this contrast (between perishing and eternal life) in 10:28. Jesus was thankful that none of the apostles "perished" except Judas in 17:12.

The phrase "should not perish but" (mã^a apolã^atai alla), is second aorist middle subjunctive, intransitive, of apollumi, which means "to destroy." There has been a considerable discussion regarding the translation of this subjunctive verb. Subjunctives function in the Greek language as verbs of possibility. This is why subjunctive verbs are frequently translated with the words "might," "should" (KJV, ASV, RSV), "may" (Young's Literal, Darby), "will," "shall," etc. Some have argued that using "will" or "shall" supports the Calvinistic doctrine of "unconditional election." In other words, once a person believes, he/she will certainly not perish.

Equally, problems can be suggested with the translation "should" as well. This word, in English, frequently allows for the opposite to occur. For example, one friend says to another: "you should major in Math." Perhaps he should, but he may decide on another major. Also, a pilot may say, "this plane should get us safely to New York." As we know, it should have, but it crashed instead. Using the English word "should" in this sense, one might understand John 3:16 to say that "if you believe in Christ, you should not perish - you still might, but you shouldn't." Obviously, this is not what the verse is saying. The problem is not about translating the verb here "will" or "shall" verses "should" or "might." Why? Because the emphasis needs to be on the verb "believes." **Jesus is clearly saying that one must continue to believe (present active participle). Once there is a cessation of faith, then condemnation replaces eternal life. If a person continues to believe (as noted earlier, that means to be obedient to Christ) then he will not perish - it is a divine guarantee (cf. 2 Peter 1:10).**

BUT - (Gk. alla - alla). This is presenting the strongest possible contrast between "should not perish" and "have eternal life." Perishing is the direction all were going. All seemed helpless and hopeless, butâ€¦

HAVE - (ech -echa) To possess or own. We don't flirt with eternal life. God doesn't want one to go back and forth - having and losing - eternal life. It is his or her possession. If we have believed in obedient faith, we have - right now - eternal life.

ETERNAL LIFE - (zwhn aiwnion -zoen aionion) This means abundant and unending life in fellowship with God (Jn. 3:36; 5:24; 17:3). "Life" means more than existing. It addresses the quality of that existence. What God intends to give can truly be qualified as living. It will not be the "eternal death" but the exact opposite. "Life" (Gk. zwh - is a key word in John, occurring 55 times. Note that the phrase "eternal life" (zwhn aiwnion) occurred also in verse 15 as a lead in to verse 16). - *Article of Uncertain Origin*

