

John 3:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This verse stands as perhaps the most concise statement of the gospel in all of Scripture. The opening "For God" (οὗτος γὰρ ἡγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς) grounds salvation entirely in divine initiative—not human merit, effort, or worthiness, but God's love as the ultimate cause.

The word "loved" (ἠγάπησεν/ēgapēsen) uses the aorist tense, pointing to a definitive historical act—particularly the giving of Christ at the cross. This is ἀγάπη (agapē), self-sacrificial love that seeks the good of the beloved regardless of cost. The phrase "so loved" (οὕτος ἡγάπησεν) indicates both the manner and degree—God loved in such a way, to such an extent.

"The world" (τὸν κόσμον/ton kosmon) is theologically stunning. In Johannine theology, the "world" often represents humanity in rebellion against God (John 1:10, 1 John 2:15-17). Yet God's love extends not merely to Israel or the righteous, but to the entire fallen human race. This cosmic scope demolishes all ethnic, social, and moral boundaries.

"His only begotten Son" (τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ/ton huion ton monogenē) emphasizes both the unique relationship and the magnitude of the gift. Monogenēs means "one and only," "unique"—not merely chronologically first but categorically

singular. God gave what was most precious to Him.

The verb "gave" (ἔδωκεν/edōken) is sacrificial language, pointing forward to the cross. This is the Father's voluntary surrender of His Son to death for sinners—the ultimate demonstration of love (Romans 5:8).

"Whosoever believeth" (πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων/pas ho pisteuōn)—literally "everyone who believes"—opens salvation to all without exception. The present participle "believeth" indicates ongoing faith, not merely intellectual assent but continuing trust and reliance on Christ.

The dual outcome is stark: "not perish" (μὴ ἀπόληται/mē apolētai)—avoiding eternal destruction—and positively "have everlasting life" (ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον/echē zōēn aiōnion). This is not merely endless existence but the very life of God imparted to believers, beginning now and continuing forever. The present subjunctive "have" indicates a present possession, not just future hope.

Historical Context

This verse occurs during Jesus's nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1-21). As a Jewish teacher, Nicodemus would have been steeped in Old Testament expectation of Messiah—but the idea of God's love extending to "the world" would have been revolutionary.

First-century Judaism maintained sharp boundaries between Jew and Gentile, righteous and sinner. The Pharisaic tradition emphasized ritual purity, separation from the unclean, and meticulous Torah observance as the path to righteousness. Nicodemus, representing Israel's religious elite, comes to Jesus acknowledging Him as a teacher from God (v.2), yet Jesus's teaching about new birth and cosmic salvation upends all his categories.

The imagery of "lifting up" the Son of Man (v.14-15) directly precedes this verse, referencing the bronze serpent Moses lifted in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9). Just as Israelites bitten by serpents looked to the bronze serpent and lived, so those "bitten" by sin must look to Christ crucified for life. This connection roots

Jesus's work in Israel's salvation history while expanding its scope to all humanity.

In the Greco-Roman world, the gods were capricious, demanding, and often hostile to humanity. Sacrifice was offered to appease angry deities or curry favor. The concept of divine self-sacrifice out of love for rebellious humanity was utterly foreign—even scandalous. Paul later calls the cross "foolishness to Greeks" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

For John's late first-century audience—facing persecution, expulsion from synagogues, and pressure from both Jewish and Roman authorities—this verse anchored their faith in God's unchanging love. Whatever their suffering, it could not separate them from the love demonstrated at the cross (Romans 8:35-39).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that God's love is the cause (not the result) of salvation change your approach to evangelism and assurance of faith?
2. What does it mean that God loved 'the world'—including those in active rebellion against Him—and how should this shape our attitude toward difficult or hostile people?
3. In what ways does the costliness of the gift (God's 'only begotten Son') reveal both the depth of His love and the seriousness of sin?
4. How does the present tense of 'believeth' and 'have' challenge purely transactional or one-time understandings of faith and salvation?

5. What is the difference between eternal life as 'endless existence' versus the Johannine concept of 'the life of God imparted to believers,' and how does this affect our Christian living now?

Interlinear Text

Οὗτως	γὰρ	ἠγάπησεν	ό	θεὸς	τὸν	κόσμον	ἄστε	τὸν
so	For	loved	G3588	God	G3588	the world	that	G3588
G3779	G1063	G25		G2316		G2889	G5620	
νίδν	αὐτὸν	τὸν	μονογενῆ	ἔδωκεν	ἵνα	πᾶς	ό	
Son	him	G3588	only begotten	he gave	that	whosoever	G3588	
G5207	G846		G3439	G1325	G2443	G3956		
πιστεύων	εἰς	αὐτὸν	μὴ	ἀπόληται	ἀλλ'	ἔχῃ	ζωὴν	
believeth	in	him	not	perish	but	have	life	
G4100	G1519	G846	G3361	G622	G235	G2192	G2222	
αἰώνιον								
everlasting								
G166								

Additional Cross-References

Romans 5:8 (Love): But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

John 3:15 (Faith): That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Romans 8:32 (Parallel theme): He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

John 6:40 (Faith): And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 3:36 (Faith): He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

1 John 4:19 (Love): We love him, because he first loved us.

John 10:28 (Eternal Life): And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Romans 5:10 (References God): For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

John 1:29 (References God): The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 (Love): Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

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