

While John 3:16 is truly one of the greatest sources of **COMFORT, ENCOURAGEMENT,** and **PEACE** to God's elect in every generation, you **CANNOT** and **MUST NOT** ever seek to build your whole idea or concept of salvation on just **ONE VERSE** taken out of its proper context. **CONTEXT** is everything when it comes to properly understanding and applying a verse like the one we are looking at this morning. Our Lord had been declaring to Nicodemus the necessity of the new birth in order for **ANY SINNER (no matter their condition morally or religiously)** to "**see**" or to "**enter the kingdom of God**", i.e., **ETERNAL LIFE** in Christ's kingdom. If you look back up a few verses, Christ mentioned His death and affirmed that His being raised on a **CROSS** was absolutely imperative in this matter of eternal life. Christ didn't say: "The Son of man **SHALL** be lifted up". He declared boldly and definitely - "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, EVEN SO MUST the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him (THIS SON OF MAN WHO MUST BE LIFTED UP) should not perish, but have eternal life.**" Put this together with Christ's words in another verse - "**And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me.**" In this verse, as well as in Christ's words to Nicodemus, the words translated into the English language as "**be lifted up**" and "**I be lifted up**" are the **same Greek word**, and in both cases they mean the same thing - 'to lift up on high' or 'to raise to the very summit of opulence and prosperity'. Paul used the same word in **Phil.2:8,9** - "**And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also HATH HIGHLY EXALTED him, and given him a name which is above every name.**" Nicodemus and the Jews as a nation were looking for an earthly Messiah or deliverer, one who would sit on an earthly throne, delivering Israel from her earthly enemies and establishing her as the world power she was under kings like David. **That was NEVER God's intention or purpose. Christ's kingdom is not of this world,** but is in fact a spiritual kingdom that Paul defined in this manner: "**For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.**"(Rom.14:17) Apart from the **NEW BIRTH**, which Christ secured by His very obedience unto death as His people's Surety and Substitute, **NO ONE** would ever see, seek, or enter this kingdom. **Let me say this before we begin to take a close look at Jn.3:16** - The mistake most lost religionists make when quoting and seeking to apply John 3:16 to themselves or other sinners is by separating it from Vss.14-15 - "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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.**" **Eternal life rests in but one thing:** the accomplished work of the Son of Man who was lifted up as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension to His throne of grace wasn't an offer by God for sinner's to either accept or reject. **IT WAS AN ACCOMPLISHMENT** for all those Christ represented - **Turn to Luke 9:28-31.**

How then are we to interpret this **WELL KNOWN** and **WELL-BELOVED** verse? **Think about it** - Every religion - every athlete - every celebrity - almost **EVERYBODY KNOWS** and **CAN QUOTE** this verse, can't they? **But here's the thing:** They don't understand the true meaning of Christ's words, thinking it teaches the false idea that God loves everybody - Christ died for everybody - and that God wants everybody to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. **LISTEN TO ME:** That is not what our Lord was teaching by His words in this all important verse.

When you tell lost, religious sinner's what this verse actually means, they get pretty combative over it. I've had people that I have discussed the Gospel of God's free grace with tell me: "Well, you just don't believe John 3:16". I am grateful for our Lord's words in John 3:16, and I do believe and love them. But we must interpret them in light of the context of this discourse, and in light of what the entirety of God's word teaches us concerning **THE LOVE OF GOD**. That being said, let's look at each part of this seemingly simple verse.

The **FIRST TRUTH** that our Lord brings forth by His words is that **GOD**, not **man**, is the absolute **FIRST CAUSE** in all things, **INCLUDING THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE** - "**FOR GOD so loved**". Nothing outside of God **Moved** or **MOTIVATED** Him to create this world, put man on it, or save any individual out of it. It was God's own Sovereign will and purpose to **CHOOSE**, to **CREATE**, to **SHOW MERCY**, and to **SAVE** whom He will - The whole **EMPHASIS** should be placed on the **CREATOR**, the **ONE WHO LOVED**, not the **CREATURE** - Turn to **Rom.9:13-21**.

The **SECOND TRUTH** we must consider is what motivated God to "**give His only begotten Son**" - "**For God SO LOVED**". You have to understand the meaning and implications of these two simple words - "**SO LOVED**", or else you'll come to the same false assumption all unregenerate men make on this subject. When an unregenerate mind reads of God's love, they immediately equate God's love in human terms, thinking that it is conditioned on what someone does or does not do. In the case of this verse, they think it teaches God **LOVES** those who will believe on him. **Answer a simple question**: Do you think God loves sinners because they first love Him? **WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES TEACH** - "**We LOVE Him, BECAUSE He first loved us.**" (I Jn.4:19) **Here's another question that demands an answer** - How **LONG** has God loved you? **Let me explain this very carefully** - God has **FROM ETERNITY, "SO LOVED"** each and every one of those He chose in Christ their **HEAD** - "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as HE HATH CHOSEN US IN HIM BEFORE the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.**" (Eph.1:3,4) Listen to Jeremiah - "**The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.**" (Jer.31:3)

That brings us to the **THIRD TRUTH** Christ's words set forth, **NAMELY, WHO** God loves. **Listen to it** - "**For God so loved THE WORLD**". I know if you believe in freewill, conditional salvation, you read this and think: "Because Christ said that God loved the **WORLD, I KNOW YOU'RE WRONG on this matter** and mean-spirited by teaching that God doesn't love everybody equally." Or else you're thinking: "It is just not fair if God doesn't love all men without exception." Again, context is everything in correctly understanding what Christ meant by His use of the word "**world**". He was speaking to a religious **JEW**, Nicodemus, who considered himself a member of the **ONLY GROUP** of people God actually loved, **i.e., Israel**. Christ has told him repeatedly of a **KINGDOM** of God, of which he is totally unaware of, **unable to either see it or enter it**, the **KINGDOM** purposed, promised, and accomplished by God. Now Christ **TELLS THIS MAN** who thought God loved **JEWS ONLY** - "**For God SO LOVED THE WORLD.**" Maybe you're thinking: "World means **WORLD**, right?" Well, if it means **ALL MEN** and women without exception, **EVERYONE WILL BE SAVED** - "**The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.**" (Jn.1:29)

"And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, **but to save the world.**"(Jn.12:47) "And all things are of God, **who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.**"(II Cor.5:18,19) As astonishing as the "new birth" was to this prejudiced religious Jew, Christ knocked his whole world out from under him by telling Him that God was saving **NOT JUST JEWS**, but "**the world**", meaning His elect from among the **GENTILE** world, those evil people the Jews consider to be little more than kindling to be destroyed by the wrath of God. **The Apostle John uses the same language in I Jn.2:2** - "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And He is the **PROPITIATION** for our sins: and **not for ours only, but also for** [the sins of] **the whole world.**" The phrase "**the whole world**" is qualified and quantified by the **CONTEXT** - Does that make sense? **Listen to me:** If God **LOVES** everybody in a saving sense, He has loved them eternally. Seeing God **DOES NOT** and **CANNOT CHANGE WITHOUT CEASING TO BE GOD, ONE OF TWO THINGS IS TRUE: Either He is no longer God, or He only eternally loves those He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world** - "**I am the Lord, I CHANGE NOT, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.**"(Mal.3:6)

I know this is true, because of the **FOURTH TRUTH** Christ set forth by these words - "**For God so loved the world, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON**". If God loves you now, it is because He first loved you in the **PERSON** of your Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Once God **CHOSE YOU IN CHRIST YOUR HEAD**, setting His love on you as you are found "**in Him**", His love for you provided in the person of Christ what His holiness and justice demanded - "**Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son** [to be] **the propitiation for our sins.**" (I John 4:10) Christ was very clear in the Sermon on the Mount - "**For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**"(Matt.5:20) God's infinite holiness and justice demands that for any sinner to enter into the kingdom of God, they must possess a righteousness that equals and answers every demand of God's law and justice, both in precept and penalty. One sin, one act of unrighteousness, **FOREVER** disqualifies you or me from entering into eternal bliss. **BUT GOD** provided for "**the WORLD**", **i.e., His elect**, a **RIGHTEOUSNESS** of infinite value, a righteousness worked out on their behalf by the doing and dying of Christ Jesus the Lord, "**the LORD our righteousness**". All of this is by His grace alone, freely **IMPUTED** to the elect sinner and rested in by God-given faith - "**For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**" (II Cor.5:21) Connect this with **II Cor.5:18,19**, and you see **HOW** God "**was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.**" God **IMPUTED** their trespasses **UNTO HIM**.

This brings us to the **FINAL TRUTH** Christ set forth in this verse - The **FRUIT** and **EFFECT** of God sending His Son into this world to "**save His people from their sin**" - "**that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**" This word "**whosoever**" causes people a lot of issues. Most interpret it as an **INVITATION**, while in reality it is a declaration. The word "**whosoever**" literally means "all". So **ALL WHO BELIEVE** should not perish, but have eternal life - "**Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto**

you the forgiveness of sins: *And by him ALL THAT BELIEVE are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*"(Acts 13:38,39) Please keep this in mind: While all men can and do believe in "a christ", or what Paul called "*another Gospel*", they CANNOT and DO NOT possess by nature that "*faith*" which is "*the gift of God*", that faith which rests and relies exclusively on Christ and His righteousness alone as their ONLY HOPE and CAUSE of salvation - Eph.2:8-10. Paul presented this truth in a reasonable way in Rom.10:13-17. Look at Christ's words concerning "*belief*" in Jn.10:24-29.

Look at the last part of this verse - "*but HAVE everlasting life.*" I was always told if I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, I'd get everlasting life. WASN'T THAT HOW THEY TAUGHT YOU? But that's not what Christ said in this verse. He was not saying to sinners, IF YOU'LL DO THIS, i.e., believe and accept, I'LL DO THAT, i.e., give you everlasting life. Listen again to how Christ stated it: That all who believe in Him should not perish, BUT HAVE everlasting life. The word translated "*have*" literally means "to have (hold) in the hand, in the sense of wearing, to have (hold) possession of the mind (refers to alarm, agitating emotions, etc.), to hold fast keep, or TO POSSESS". Christ was saying that all those who POSSESS or have been given eternal life, THEY BELIEVE. Here's the same truth set forth in John 1:12,13 - "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: WHICH WERE BORN, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, BUT OF GOD.*" Believing is the RESULT, literally the FRUIT and EFFECT of Christ bestowing life, THE NEW BIRTH, that which He purchased for every object of His love by His being "*lifted up*" - "*And I, if I be lifted up, I WILL DRAW ALL [men] unto me.*"(Jn.12:32) The NEW BIRTH does not save us - Christ as the One sent of the Father saved us, and because of His effectual work, He purchased for us every aspect of everlasting life - "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*"(Eph.2:1-7)

In reality, there's a lot more to these wonderful words of this wonderful verse. Christ wasn't offering salvation to anyone, but was in reality declaring to Nicodemus and all God's elect in every generation the ACCOMPLISHMENT and APPLICATION of all that He would do by His very obedience unto death.