

God Loves You



William Pearce

# God Loves You

*An Exposition of John 3:16*

*By William P. Pearce*

*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.*

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## 1. The Lover – God

To know God is the highest and noblest aspiration of the soul. “I have always,” sang Robert Browning, “had one lode-star; now as I look back, I see that I have halted or hastened as I looked toward that star – a need, a trust, a yearning after God.”

It is only through love that we learn to know God. Classic Greece and Rome are called by those who knew them best, “a world without love,” while the uncivilized Algonkins had no such word till the missionary who translated the Bible into their tongue invented one. But our language and Bible teach it, and we believe, as Lord Tennyson wrote, “Through the will of the One who knows and rules, utter knowledge is but utter love.”

Some people tell us that we cannot know God. Blessed be His name, we can. When Phillips Brooks told the deaf, blind, and dumb Helen Keller, as a child, that God was her Heavenly Father, she answered: “I knew that before. I think I have always known it.”

Lord Kelvin, better known as Sir William Thomson, said, “Forty years ago, walking somewhere in the country, I asked Liebig if he believed that the grass and the flowers which he saw around us grew by mere chemical forces. He answered, ‘No! No more than I would believe that a book of botany, describing them, could grow by mere chemical forces.’”

Henry Ward Beecher had a celestial globe in his study. On it was an excellent representation of the constellations and the stars which compose them. Robert G. Ingersoll, the atheist lawyer, saw the

apparatus and was delighted with it. After examining it closely, he said, "It's just what I want. Who made it?"

"Who made it?" Beecher replied facetiously. "Why, nobody made it, Colonel. It just happened!"

"Show me your God," demanded the Emperor Trajan of Joshua, a Jewish rabbi.

"Come out of the house and see one of His ambassadors," replied the sage.

Leading the emperor into an open space, the rabbi bade him look upon the sun, then shining in his strength. "What! Can you not look in the face of the ambassador?" he asked. "Are you blinded by his dazzling presence? How, then, can you look upon the countenance of the King?"

God is everywhere, and His name is written upon all His works. His majesty is seen in the towering mountain and the mighty ocean; His love shines in every flower and dewdrop; His voice is heard in the storm; and His glory is depicted on the variegated landscape, in the lightning flash, and in the magnificent aurora.

"This world's no blot for us, nor blank. It means intensely, and means good."

If the Arabian guide crossing the desert of Sahara with a French scientist saw in the sinking sun the wisdom and glory of the Creator; if Galileo saw in the construction of a wheat straw that lay on his prison floor the work of an intelligent Maker; if Coleridge, when standing before Mont Blanc, uncovered his head in reverence to its Creator; if Jenny Lind fell upon her knees and gave thanks to God when she first saw Niagara; and if – "To blind old Milton's rayless orbs, A light divine is given; And deaf Beethoven hears the

hymns And harmonies of heaven,” – surely we, who walk through fields of golden grain, and sit beneath trees laden with luscious fruit, and drink from the sweet, gurgling springs, must be blind and deaf if we perceive not God’s love!

“All nature speaks the attributes of God, whose vast domain of matter and of mind accords forever with His holy will. All life is an expression of His love.”

God is Fatherly love. To create is not to be a father in the highest sense of the term. The artist is not called the father of the picture he paints; neither is the inventor called the father of the machine he contrives. To be a father is to communicate an existence like his own. All who believe in Jesus become through Him “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

Children of God! Think of it! John said, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). Precious relationship, is it not? In relation to humanity, He is King; but to those in Christ Jesus, Father! In the New Testament Scriptures, God is spoken of as King only five times, but as Father more than two hundred; while in the memorable Sermon on the Mount, this term is used sixteen times. It is baptism in the name of the Father; the lesson about prayer and providence begins with the word Father; the announcement of Christ’s Messiahship is in the name of the Father; the Advocate is with the Father; the Comforter is to come from the Father; “our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,” of whom the latter

declared: "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me" (1 John 1:3; John 16:27).

A young minister in a London church lost his wife. He had a little child and the church members hoped some relative would come to help him take care of it, but none appeared. Two or three years passed, and one Sunday, when the church pews were full, the minister came up the aisle leading the child, whom he seated in the corner of the front pew. The service went on until the sermon began. In his sermon, the minister spoke of the mother of Christ and her agony of heart at the cross. He said, "Think what a child's life is without a mother's love! Who else can wrap a babe in swaddling clothes? Who can tend, who can cherish, who can love, but a mother?" In the depth of feeling, the preacher's strong voice halted, as if waiting for an answer; and in the hush of the great congregation, a little child's voice spoke out very sweetly and clearly, "A father would do every bit as well, Papa."

So our Father, with a heart more tender than a mother's, with sympathy more pronounced than a brother's, and with love exceeding all human love combined, seeks to do the greatest good and be the greatest good to the greatest number of the family of mankind. Can we not then say with Jesus, "Our Father," and declare with Marianne Farningham, –

"Our Father knows, our Father cares!  
How great Thy gentleness!  
We dare to live, and dare to die,  
We are not fatherless.  
Dear Father, whom we cannot see,  
Our life is glad because of Thee."

## 2. The Intensity – So Loved

The first line of Genesis reads, “In the beginning God,” and according to the beloved disciple, “God is love” (Gen. 1:1; 1 John 4:8). Love, therefore, must have been the first thing that inhabited space. It must have existed before God said, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). It must have been the master of all arts before the heavens were studded with glittering stars. And when heaven and earth pass away, love will still endure; for “love never faileth” (1 Cor. 13:8). It is indestructible.

To all creatures, God has imparted, to a greater or lesser degree, this attribute of love. The lower forms of animal life are not devoid of it, and as the scale of being rises, so does the degree of love increase. It is noticed in the mother race of birds, beasts, and reptiles, but while love in the human being, and especially in the Christian, is not bounded by family ties, it reaches out to all classes and reveals itself in a thousand ways.

The statement, God “so loved” is not without proof. Everything demonstrates it. He “so loved” as to make a beautiful world; “so loved” as to make a pure man able to inhabit the world; “so loved” as to walk and talk with this man in the world; “so loved” as to devise a plan to save man when he fell victim to temptation; “so loved” as to warn transgressors of their ways, and to give promises and hold out inducements to live holy lives; “so loved” as to give a Redeemer to restore to man what he had forfeited by sin; “so loved” as to adopt into His family all who would approach Him in the name of His Son; so loved as to prepare mansions for all in His celestial Paradise. And this love has not stopped. Still, He loves us.

Are we weary? He desires to give us rest. Are we sad? He desires to give us joy. Are we weak? He desires to give us strength. Are we in darkness? He desires to give us light. Are we living in the shadow? He desires to lead us into the sunshine. Are we longing for home? He desires us to trust Him, for, said He, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). "So loved!" Oh, that every mind would grasp the thought of this phrase! Then young and old, intelligent and ignorant, rich and poor, would see in this little word the infinite ocean of His affection. "God so loved!"

And if God is love, and His love has been and is so intensely manifested, should not all His intelligent creatures reciprocate it? Such a question determines one's respect, for love begets love. It determines one's character, for love alone understands love. It also determines one's knowledge, for "he that loveth not, knoweth not God" (1 John 4:8). There is no true way of knowing Him except by loving Him. This love should be a love of the heart, with all the powers of affection consolidated and centralized in God. Love is to hold someone dear, and for that someone, it will not hesitate to call into action every muscle, nerve, and strength.

When Frontenac died, he bequeathed his heart in a golden casket to his wife, who said, "I never had it while he was living. I will not take it when he is dead." Many, while living, armor-plate their hearts with the love of the world, thus resisting the sweetness of divine love; but when dying, they wish to bequeath their hearts to God. No greater evidence can there be of lack of genuine heart-love, for "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).



Love of country has caused thousands upon thousands of soldiers to march, fight, and defend their flag with their lives. Love for a master prompts the servant to brave any storm, run any risk, battle with any difficulty while strength remains. Love for a dear one will put forth the utmost exertion by night or by day until exhausted nature compels a rest. So, likewise, will not love for God be shown in homage and service with one's strength?

Loving God with one's strength is not mere sentiment, but careful action. It is not a heedless thing, but earnest. It is not spasmodic, but constant. Wayland Hoyt writes of a group of stars called Perseus, which shine for two days with the brilliancy of a star of the second magnitude; then suddenly lose their light, and in three hours drop to the radiance of a star of the fourth magnitude; then, in another three and a half hours, they flash up into their former brightness, but only to grow dim again. So is the love of many professed Christians to God. For a season, it is bright and strong, then dim and weak. But God wants love of strength, wherever we are, with whomsoever we are, and in whatever circumstances we are placed. Should He not have it? Shall we not give it?

When Gustave Dore was putting the finishing touch on the face of the Jesus he was painting, a lady stepped quietly into the studio and stood admiring the picture. Turning, the artist noticed the visitor and politely said, "Ah, Madame! I did not know you were here."

The lady replied, "Monsieur Dore, you must love Him to be able to paint Him so!" "Love Him, Madame? I should think I do love Him! But if I loved Him more,

I should paint Him better.” So likewise, if we loved Him more, we would show it by our strength of purpose, determination, and action.

“What if God should place in your hand a diamond,” wrote Payson to a young divinity student, “and tell you to inscribe on it a sentence which should be read at the last day, and shown there as an index of your thoughts and feelings. What care and caution would you exercise in the selection! Now, this is what God has done. He has placed before you human minds, on which you are about to inscribe, every day and every hour, by your instruction, by your spirit, and by your example, something which will remain, and be exhibited for or against you at the judgment day.”

What sentence shall be inscribed on our minds? Shall it be one of the world? God forbid! For it will rise to condemn us when we stand before Him. Shall it be relative to self? No, no! For that will make for vanity. Shall it be done to honor God? Yes, for the chief end of life is to glorify Him. What, then, shall the sentence be? “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10).

Who, or what, shall separate us from God’s love? Not “death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature” (Rom. 8:38, 39).

As Isaac Watts wrote,

“Not all that men on earth can do,  
Nor powers on high, nor powers below,  
Shall cause His mercy to remove,  
Or wean our hearts from Christ, our love.”

### 3. The Object – The World

Wherever love exists, there is found an object of that love. It was love for children that led Robert Raikes to establish the Sunday school, love of suffering prisoners that prompted John Howard to bring about prison reform, love for suffering soldiers that inspired Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton to venture onto the battlefield. Love for the heathen lent fame to Carey, love for birds gave honor to Audubon, love for nature bestowed glory on Thoreau, love for bees brought a fortune to Huber, and love for the slaves gave perpetuity to the names of Wilberforce and Lincoln.

Every library and every mechanic's shop is an evidence of the love of knowledge; every picture gallery and flower garden tells of the love of beauty; every cheerful home, however void of costly furniture, speaks of the love of industry.

Love turns to its object as the magnetic needle points to the north. Like the law of gravity is to draw everything earthward, so the law of love is to draw everything heavenward. The lover's gift is to appeal to the receiver's heart. The nuptial knot is the result of mutual love. The mother rocks the cradle, not for the cradle's sake, but for love of the little life in the cradle.

Unlike the thermometer, which rises and lowers to the outside temperature, love does not fluctuate. For association with its object, it will give strength and swiftness; for its defense, it will impart courage and banish fear; for its pleasure, it will remove painful thorns and scatter flowers in its pathway; and for its salvation, it will bleed in sacrifice and die in atonement.

The object of God's love is the world. It is not the material world that God so loves, but sinful creatures in the world, to whom He gave life and a resemblance of Himself, desiring "all men to be saved" (3 Pet. 3:9). According to Paul's writing to Timothy, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

This love shines brighter from the fact that this is a sinful world. From the day our first parents sinned, sin has been increasing until the earth groans beneath its corruption. Sin has wrung tears from millions of eyes, broken millions of hearts, blasted millions of hopes, dug millions of graves, and ruined millions of souls. There is not a crime to which the world has not stooped, not a vice in which it has not indulged, not a risk it has not run, not an infamous charge it has not laid against God, and yet God loves the world. Could there be a more touching appeal to our hearts?

This love is more conspicuous from the fact that this is a treacherous world. God's love reaches out to save us from sorrow and death, but we must reach back and grasp the hand of God. To seek the pleasure of the world is to jeopardize the soul. There is not a glittering gem that the world offers that will not bring sorrow as it did to Achan, nor an honor the world can bestow that will not crush the receiver, as it did Haman, and not a devotee at its shrine to whom it will not prove traitorous, as it did to Absalom. Beware of its sparkling beverage. It is drugged. Beware of its kiss, for while it kisses, it will stab, as Joab stabbed Amasa. Beware of its promise of liberty, for it will lead into captivity and death. But listen! It is good news. God so loved the world, the treacherous world, the present world, as to provide a way to save all who will come unto Him.

This love is still more wonderful from the fact that this is a rebellious world. During the Revolutionary War, a conscientious objector named Miller was viscously insulted by a man named Widman, who was afterward sentenced to be hanged as a British spy. Miller went to General Washington and begged for Widman's life. The Commander-in-Chief replied, "I would like to release Widman because he is your friend, but I dare not, even for that consideration."

"Friend," cried Miller, "Why, he is my worst enemy, and therefore I want to save him."

"Enemy," said Washington, "You have come to me for your enemy's sake? Then I pardon him."

How much more God's love to the world! Widman insulted Miller once; the world insults God continually! Widman spat in Miller's face; the world continually treats God with contempt. Widman was sentenced to death; justice has demanded the penalty of death on the world, but God's love has interceded. God's love has offered mercy.

There is no reason that God should love a world that has hated and despised Him, but there are great and strong reasons that the world should love Him. Though independent, His very nature craves the love of His creatures. To love God is the greatest service, the most pleasant occupation, and the loftiest privilege in which man can engage, and the reason the world does not love Him is because it has not yet discovered that "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Love God, you who peruse these pages. The love of God is the only basis for a noble character, the only true principle for a pure life, the only bond that cannot be broken by death, the only investment that will bring

an eternal interest. Will you love Him? Say, "By His help, I will." Then pray, "Leave me not, my Strength, my Trust; Oh, remember I am dust. Leave me not again to stray; fix my heart on things above; make me happy in Thy love."

Before the Civil War, a traveler passing through the South had pity on a young slave. He purchased her from her master and gave the girl her freedom. After the bargain had been completed, he found difficulty in making the girl realize that she was actually free. At last, that fact finally dawned on her in its fullness, but, instead of exulting in her newly-gained liberty, she exclaimed, "Oh, he has set me free! I can never thank him enough! I will serve him all my life!" She thought not of pleasing herself, but her friend. And when anyone would speak of her loving service to her benefactor, she would reply, "He redeemed me! He redeemed me! I will serve him all my life."

If only there was more love like this to Him who loved us so much. He deserves it. He should have it. Will you not so love Him? Tune your heart and voice, dear friend, to sing: —

"Thee will I love, my strength, my tower;  
Thee will I love, my joy, my crown ;  
Thee will I love, with all my power,  
In all my works, and Thee alone.

Thee will I love, till sacred fire  
Fill my whole soul with pure desire."

#### 4. The Proof – That He Gave

Love never asks, “What shall I get?” but always, “What shall I give?” As the touch of the electric button makes the bell ring or turns on the light, so love with its gentle touch makes the tongue speak, the eye glow, the cheek smile, the hands work, the brain think, and the heart feel.

Thomas à Kempis, in *Imitation of Christ*, speaks of love as that which makes every heavy thing light, “thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility... Though weary, it is not tired; though pressed it is not straitened; though alarmed, it is not confounded; but as a living flame it forces itself upwards and securely passes through all.” Henry Ward Beecher said, “When there is love in the heart, there are rainbows in the eyes.”

Anything that gives comfort, extends privileges, and is a blessing, is simply God’s love gift to humanity. Everything before and since the unequalled gift of His Son centers in that gift itself. “He gave,” and still gives. The whole history of the world is a history of gifts. God gave His wisdom in fashioning the world, His strength in laying its foundation, His radiance in lighting it, His beauty in adorning it, His breath in making it fragrant. Does the earth need rain? God “giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields” (Job 5:10). Does it need seasons? “I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time” (Lev. 26:4, 5). Do its inhabitants need life? Isaiah declares, “He...giveth

breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein" (Isa. 42:5). Do they need strength? David sings, "The God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people" (Ps. 68:35). Do they need an abundance of wisdom and knowledge? Solomon boasts that "God giveth to a man that is good in His sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" (Eccl. 2:26). Do they need life eternal? Paul declares, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

An interesting thing about the love-gifts of God is the manner in which they are given. Lavater said, "The manner of giving shows the character of the giver more than the gift itself." God's love-gifts are diversified and gratuitous. Paul, interrogating the Romans, said, "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?" (Rom. 8:32). Not that He is under obligation, but, loving us, such gifts are His supreme delight. These gifts come in all forms and for all classes, in demonstration of fixed laws of His bountiful provision.

Rowland Hill had two men in his congregation in opposite circumstances. One was rich, the other poor. The rich man placed a sum of money in Mr. Hill's hand for the poor man. It was not to be sent all at once. First was a note for five pounds with the endorsement, "More to follow." Every few months came the remittance with the same message: "More to follow." So with God's gifts. Not only are they free as the air we breathe, the babe we hold in our arms, the scent of a flower on a spring day, or the embrace of a friend, but each is prophetic of another supply already on the way.

God's love-gifts are liberal. They are "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).



He opens His hand, and the feathered songsters, the finny tribe, the beasts of hill and vale, are fed. From the heavenly storehouse, He supplies the needs of His intelligent creatures. To each, these needs are supplied “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). We may be poor regarding this world’s goods, but we can be rich because of this love-check of God.

When Lawrence was called before the emperor to give an account of the church treasures, he was asked where they were concealed. He answered that within three days, he would show them. On the third day, he gathered together the sick and the poor whom he had used the money on, and bringing them before the emperor, said, “Behold, here are the treasures of the church, the needs of whom have been supplied.” And one glimpse of man is evidence that the outstretched hand of God discloses a loving heart as He scatters blessings as liberal as the sun’s rays.

A story is told of a poor woman who looked longingly at the flowers in a king’s garden, wishing to buy some for her sick daughter. She was repelled by the gardener, who rudely told her, “The king’s flowers are not for sale.” The king, chancing to pass, plucked a bouquet and gave it to the wistful woman, saying, “The king does not sell his flowers. He gives them away.” How much like our loving Father; for when He gives, it is with a kingly spirit, and from His kingly storehouse of abundance. All life, all health, all freedom, all sustenance come from Him. “The silver is mine,” says He, “and the gold is mine” (Hag. 2:8). “Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10). “They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing” (Ps. 34:10).

As God has given to us, we too must give, and in so giving, we shall find it more to our advantage than His. Like the pupil who said to Socrates, when others were giving rich gifts, "I have nothing to give but myself," we shall find in reality that God will do as the philosopher answered, "I will endeavor to give thee back to thyself better than I received thee." And when should this exchange be made? There is but one season in which God deals with man, and that is now. Now is the market in which to buy the kingdom of God. Now is the time to become Godlike. Now, or it may be never. For, "The moment we forego eternity itself cannot retrieve."

When the "Rio de Janeiro" struck a rock at the entrance of the San Francisco harbor in February of 1902, 128 lives were lost. Consul Wildman of China was aboard with his family. The captain offered the Wildman's the first chance to get in the lifeboat, but Mrs. Wildman refused to go without her husband. Later, Mr. Wildman urged her to go, and while she was preparing to get into the boat, the ship sank, and all perished. Hesitation on the part of one not only meant death to that one, but to others as well. Hesitation on your part to give your heart to God may mean not only the loss of your own soul, but the loss of other souls, so don't hesitate. Make the decision to give your heart to Him today!

"Give, for God to thee hath given;  
Love, for He by love is known;  
Child of God, and heir of heaven,  
Let thy parentage be shown."

## 5. The Gift – His Only Son

There is a great diversity of gifts! Many are ordinary, some extraordinary. All cost something, few everything. Frequently the gift outlasts the giver, but the love outlasts both. Roses fade, yet their perfume rises to permeate and purify the atmosphere. Sunbeams fall, but they leave a variety of color on every leaf, blade, and face they touch. Nothing exists of itself. Everything is composed of elements or influences which date back into the past and reach forward into the future. Cause and effect go hand in hand. Love and gifts are inseparable as sun and light. Because God was love, He gave; and because He still loves, He gives.

Love's arithmetic is that of addition. It gives to give. God gave Jesus, Jesus gave Himself. Like a double flower, inseparable in the arrangement of its petals, so the Godhead is inseparable in love. Love was the glorious principle that prompted God to give His Son, and love was the impelling motive that brought that Son to us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God was no more willing to give Jesus than Jesus was willing to give Himself. The desire to give was mutual. Both loved with the same intensity, loved the same object, and loved with the same purpose — the salvation of those scarred and cursed by sin.

Vincent de Paul was educated for the priesthood. While on his way to Marseilles, the ship on which he journeyed was captured by pirates, and he was taken to Tunis and sold as a slave. After serving a few years, he escaped, crossing the Mediterranean in a small boat. At

Marseilles, he came in contact with a prisoner on one of the prison ships. Vincent tried to talk to him, but the convict evaded the interrogations until love touched his heart and lips, and the words came out, "My wife and children, they will starve. If I were at liberty, I could care for them, but now," and an agonized gesture finished the sentence.

Vincent de Paul's face was transformed, and clasping the chained hand of the prisoner, he said, "Be brave, my brother. God bids me tell you to hope." A few days elapsed, and the captive was with his family. Vincent de Paul, by some means, had taken his place.

Did Christ, our Lord, do any less? Did He not see humanity shackled by sin? Did He not hear the cry of despair? Did not that unequaled love which angels never comprehended prompt Him to take their place, bear their burdens, weep their tears, and share their heartaches? — Yes! The gift of God was specific and unspeakable. He gave His only begotten Son.

Such a Gift! Before it, the angels were such as never was before or since. It was not money nor lands, men nor angels, but His Son, the Lord of Glory! How great the gift! In this gift, how great the evidence of God's love! Wonderful! Amazing!

While an evangelist read and explained John three-sixteen at a street meeting, a hardhearted man stepped up to him and said, "I'm a bad man, I've committed almost every crime, but I have two little boys, and I love my boys. I wouldn't give one of them for the best friend I've got. When you said that God so loved me that He gave His Son, that broke my heart." And it ought to break any heart; for love, so excelling

was never shown as when God “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32).

Eleanor, the wife of Edward the First of England, risked her life to save that of her husband by sucking the poison from a wound made by a poisoned dagger. The emperor of Austria conferred the Silver Crown of Merit on a young soldier who, finding a young shepherdess that had been bitten by a viper, sucked the poison, thus saving her life, but rendering himself a life-long invalid. Both jeopardized their lives for others.

William Phelps and James Stansbury were cleaning the inside of an eight-foot boiler at the cereal mills in Indianapolis. An employee, thinking the valve was tight, turned on the steam, which poured in on them. The only exit was up a ladder to a manhole in the top. Both jumped for the ladder. Phelps reached it first but, stepping aside, shouted, “You go first, Jim. You are married.” Stansbury escaped, slightly burned, but poor Phelps, before he reached the top of the ladder, was so fearfully scalded that the flesh was dropping from his limbs. He lived only two hours in agony. Before dying, he said, “It was Jim’s right to go first. He’s married.” A sacrifice for a fellow workman.

Thomas Hovenden, the artist of “Breaking Home Ties,” saw little Bessie Peifer crossing the railroad tracks near Norristown, Pennsylvania, when a fast train was bearing down upon her. When the engineer saw the little figure standing between the rails, he blew his whistle frantically, but the child, becoming confused, did not avoid the train. Instantly Mr. Hovenden rushed forward and seized the little girl in his arms, but before he could make the leap that would have saved them

both, the engine struck him and hurled him with terrific force across the track. The engineer stopped his train as soon as possible, and with his fireman, ran where Mr. Hovenden and the little girl were lying side by side. Both were dead—one the sacrifice for the other.

But when God gave His Son, it was the most painful sacrifice, made so that sinners and traitors might be reconciled to Him. He gave life to redeem life. He demonstrated love to magnify God's love in the design of human redemption, hesitating at no peril, nor pausing at the greatest sacrifice. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7).

The cross in which our faith centers, from which poets, artists, and orators draw their inspiration, is "the highest, the most complete, manifestation of the love of God." There, and there alone, was atonement made for the sins of the world. There, and there only, was man's substitute for sin. There He died, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18).

What shall we do with this Gift? To reject it is to lose out on eternal life. To accept it is to inherit the most sublime happiness heaven can bestow, to be emancipated from a life-long bondage, and to have conferred on us "a life which is beyond the conditions or occasions of dissolution." Which shall it be? "I have set before you," says God, "life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19).

## 6. The Proviso – Whosoever Believeth

Love is the lodestone of life. It is a magnet by which many are unconsciously drawn. Nothing is so universal, so great, or so strong. It is the bond of heaven and the only true bond of earth. But love precedes love's gifts. The former is gratuitous; the latter are conditional. God loved before He made the world, loved before He gave His Son to die for those in the world, but in this beautiful declaration of John three-sixteen, faith is the condition by which this precious Gift may be received. On one's belief in Christ depends his eternal salvation.

After the battle of Pittsburg Landing, Dwight L. Moody was personally requested to visit the hospital of a wounded soldier who wanted the great evangelist to help him die. Mr. Moody said, "I would take you right up in my arms and carry you into the kingdom of God if I could, but I can't do it. I can't help you to die."

"Then who can?" asked the soldier.

"The Lord Jesus Christ," Mr. Moody answered. "It was He who came into this world for that purpose."

The soldier shook his head and said, "He can't save me. I have sinned all my life."

"But He came to save sinners," Mr. Moody answered. Then he prayed and read this third chapter of John. His eyes were riveted on the preacher till he came to the fourteenth and fifteenth verses. "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."

"Does it say that?" he asked. "Does it say that whoever believes may have eternal life? Read it again."

Mr. Moody read it three times. The face of the soldier brightened, his faith took hold of Christ, and his dying appearance seemed to say, "My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary!"

When Henry Trumbull was a prisoner during the Civil War, a friend of his in Washington persuaded the Government to release him. Soon it was rumored that one of the nine hundred prisoners would be released. In due time, an officer lined the prisoners up and called out, "Henry Clay Trumbull, three paces forward!" No one moved. Again he repeated, "Henry Clay Trumbull, three paces forward." A man looked up the line, and, seeing no one else move, he stepped forward.

"Why did you hesitate?" inquired the officer.

"Because I thought there might be another Henry Clay Trumbull," replied the pardoned soldier.

But in John three-sixteen, there is nothing said of Trumbull's. It reads "whosoever," and that carries more assurance than any earthly name. It shows no limitation or restriction in the divine offer. All can have a share, for Christ "gave Himself a ransom for all," and tasted death "for every man" (1 Tim. 2:6: Heb. 2:9).

Salvation is so plainly stated in the Bible that "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa. 35:8). Its conditions are so easy that all may be saved, but if anyone will not meet them, Jesus has declared that they "shall be condemned."

While salvation is of Christ, belief on man's part is essential before the greatest gift of God is conferred. Belief in Christ is necessary. In fact, belief is so important that most of the chapters in John's Gospel contain the word, until he finally declares, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ,



the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:31).

John Wesley once attended a very important conference with some of his leading associates. Faith, or belief, was the subject under discussion. When no one was able to give a satisfactory definition, Mr. Wesley said, “Let us call Mrs. Jones. She can tell us what it means to believe because she conscientiously exercises her faith.” When asked to define belief, she replied, “It is taking God at His word.” That’s it — believing what He says, and believing in the application of what He has said to us. Such belief is an active rather than a passive principle.

One unhappy delusion of many is the treacherous disbelief of those who claim to believe. A group of ladies visiting a company were taken into a laboratory. The chemist showed them a vessel containing a certain solution. He then explained its properties and told them that by moistening the hand with it, molten lead could be picked up without pain or injury. He told them why the hot lead could not burn the flesh when moistened with the solution. The visitors were greatly interested, and when the professor asked if they believed him, they said they did. “Now,” he said, “here is a pot of molten lead. Which one of you will handle it?”

No one responded. They shrank back from the seething mass, whose heat could be felt several feet away as he urged, “You say you believe what I told you. Just try it.” Still, no one dared. Then he dipped his hand into the solution and, plunging it into the lead, declared it did not harm him. Though they said they believed, they would not try themselves. They thought they believed, but it was not a belief that would lead

them to act. Similarly, there are many who believe in Jesus as a historic character, as the Great Reformer, as the wonderful Miracle Worker, or as the Saviour of the world, but they have not believed in Him to test His power to save them. Reader, how is your faith?

Ethan Allen, the New England atheist, was called to his dying daughter's side. "Papa," she said, "I am going to die. Mama says there is a Christ and a heaven – if I trust Him. You say there is no heaven. I am dying, papa, and I must make my final decision now. Who should I believe – mama's Christ or your infidelity?" The great soldier's frame shook with emotion. He had just finished his famous book called 'Reason, the Only Oracle of Man,' but turning from that, he said, "My darling, you would better die in your mother's faith, and not in my unbelief." Why? Because unbelief in Christ is disastrous and destructive, while belief in Him is comforting, elevating, purifying, and saving.

Unbelief is the sin of all sins, the occasion of all sins, and the soul-destroying sin. There is no other sin so abominable in the sight of God. It reflects the greatest dishonor upon Him, for it makes Him a liar. It darkens one's life, decreases one's happiness, and destroys one's soul. Some say that this is going too far, but is the physician going too far when he tells the poisoned patient that he will die unless he takes the remedy? Or the fireman when he says to flee, or you will perish in the flames? No, no! We discern the truth and are ready to meet the conditions.

In the language of faith, cry aloud, "Lord, I believe!" Do this, and you will be saved. Neglect it, and your doom is sealed.

## 7. The Purpose – Should Not Perish

Without a doubt, the most calamitous word of John three-sixteen is “perish.” But, as a dark background sets off a light picture, so the sadness, misfortune, peril, and death connected with this word aid in beautifying the contrast — life, eternal life.

Every non-Christian member of the human family is in a perishing condition, whether he realizes it or not. Because the sleeper is unconscious of escaping gas, is that to say they are not in a perishing condition? Because one has health, home, means, title, friends, do these things make his spiritual condition any better? No, the Bible teaches, and daily evidence proves, that in the midst of life, man is in death.

A few years ago, a Mr. Breedlove and his son, with Mr. Fish, a young man of wealth, perished on the Colorado Desert. The position and condition of the bodies told the cause of their death. The supply of water was exhausted. The elder Breedlove knew that at the base of Cocopali Mountain was a water spring, so the three men mounted their mules and started for the spring. The sun shone with intense heat, and the conditions were too harsh. Soon Mr. Fish fell from his mule and died. The Breedlove’s hastened onward. The animals gave out and were given their liberty. About three miles from the spring, young Breedlove dropped on the burning sand. Imagine the feelings of that father as he left his son to seek the life-preserving liquid. His steady step showed determination, but a mile from the mountain, he stumbled. When only a quarter of a mile from the spring, he had fallen, and the mark of the canteen on the ground showed that it had fallen from

his hand. He must have risen with difficulty and struggled on a little farther, but when found by the searching party, he was lying within two hundred yards of the spring—almost to the spring, yet perished!

The “Royal Charter” had sailed around the world and was homeward bound. Arriving at Queenstown, a message was received that she would be at her dock in Liverpool the next morning. The Lord Mayor of Liverpool, with a band of musicians and thousands of people, waited to welcome her home. But the “Royal Charter” went down in the night between Queenstown and Liverpool, with almost all on board. The wife of the first mate was a member of Dr. William M. Taylor’s church in Liverpool, and he was delegated to convey the news to her. On ringing the doorbell, a bright-faced, sunny-haired little girl answered and, seeing who it was, said, “Oh, Dr. Taylor! I thought it was my papa. He is coming home today!” On stepping into the house, Dr. Taylor found the breakfast table spread in the sitting room, and the wife dressed to receive her husband. “You must excuse us,” she said, “for having the table here at this hour, but you know my husband is coming home today, and if you stay, it will make the day like heaven.” Taking both her hands in his, Dr. Taylor said, “My poor woman, the Royal Charter went down last night, and your husband was lost and can never come home again.” She looked at him for a moment, then, drawing her hands from his, shrieked, “Oh no! So near home and yet lost!”

The analogy is true spiritually. Hundreds are near the kingdom and are loved by Jesus, but perish rather than obey Him. They get a glimpse of the promised land, but never enter. Like Felix, they are “almost”

persuaded, but perish. Is that your condition? If it is, lay down this book, fall upon your knees, and beseech God for Christ's sake to save you from that death of all deaths, when the lost will cry out, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20).

God being love, He desires to save all from perishing. "As I live," says God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze. 33:11).

There are many things from which there is no assurance of deliverance. God has not promised to save us from all misfortunes, nor has He promised to save us from every trouble, but from this awful perishing of the soul, Christ has agreed to deliver us if we will meet the condition, and that condition is faith in His power to rescue.

A group of women and children were standing on the dock of a popular seaside resort, awaiting the ship that carried their husbands and fathers, when a splash was heard outside. Looking out, they saw a young man struggling in the water. He could not swim, and in his frantic efforts to rescue himself, he drifted into deeper water and farther from the shore. The women looked around for help. They found only one person who was capable — an old sailor, standing by motionless and watching the poor man drown. They appealed to him in vain. As the young man bobbed above the water, gasping for breath, the little company looked on in horror, unwilling witnesses of his death. When all hope appeared lost, the brave sailor got up and dove into the water and, as the youth rose for the last time, seized him and carried him safely to shore. As the women gathered around him, he said, "I had to wait until he

stopped trying to save himself and lost all his strength. His efforts would have interfered with my rescue.”

The same is true with Jesus. As long as the lost soul endeavors to save himself, he cannot be saved. He may resort to religious forms and ceremonies, or try to defeat his demons, or engage in deeds of mercy and acts of charity, but he must stop his struggling and rely on Christ’s power and love to save.

When Alexander of Russia visited Napoleon at Toulon, the French emperor gave his illustrious visitor the privilege of liberating one convict. Speaking to one whose intelligent look aroused his curiosity, he asked his crime. The convict told a long story of innocence and how he was imprisoned by the testimony of false witnesses. The prince went to another, and another, and still another, only to learn that they had all been unjustly condemned. Finally, he found a man who looked very sad. Inquiring into the cause of his punishment, the man replied, “I have been a terrible man and deserve more than my present punishment. I have openly defied the laws of both God and men. I am not fit to look on the blue heavens or the green earth.” The Russian monarch, pleased with his confession, said to his attendants, “Set this man free. He is in a fit state of mind to make proper use of liberty.” Turning to the convict, he said, “Go, use your liberty for God’s honor, to whose clemency you owe it.”

The prisoner never thought the door of liberty would open to him, but the poor, perishing sinner may know, for Jesus has emphatically declared that if he will believe in His love and His power to liberate from sin, he “should not” perish. Stretch forth thy hands of faith, O unconverted soul! And thou shalt not perish.

## 8. The Pledge – Everlasting Life

The pledge of John three-sixteen is life. In fact, the whole Bible is a message of life. In the Old and New Testaments, the word “life” occurs four hundred times, and is mentioned in fifty-three of the sixty-six books. It is the “tree of life” in Genesis, the “path of life” in the Psalms, the “word of life” in John’s Gospel, the “river of water of life,” “a crown of life,” and the “Lamb’s book of life” in Revelation.

Nothing is more valued and precious than life. One will sacrifice money, lands, even a part of his body for the extension and enjoyment of life. Our lives, however, are bound by the circle of a few years. The cradle and the tomb are only a short span apart. No sooner does man begin to live than he begins to die. As Richard Henry Wilde so eloquently wrote, “Life is like the summer rose, That opens to the morning sky, But, e’er the shades of evening close, Is scattered on the ground to die.” In spite of this, God has given us hope.

In the second century, a martyr was brought before a king who wanted him to recant and give up his faith in Christ. The king said, “If you do it not, I shall banish you.” The man smiled and answered, “You cannot banish me from Christ, for He says that He will never leave me nor forsake me.”

The king became angry and said, “Well, I will confiscate your property and take it all from you.”

The man replied, “My treasures are laid up in heaven; you cannot get them.”

The king angrily retaliated, “I will kill you.”

The man answered, “I am dead to the world; my life is hid with Christ in God, and you cannot touch it.”

What a thought! Christ being the source of the Christian life, it makes him secure. This life is only the beginning. "Only the dull bud is seen now," said one, "but in time, the flower will burst into rich bloom."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you," said Jesus, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). Two words in the passage must not be overlooked—"believeth" and "hath." The one shows the means of eternal salvation. The other is the assurance of it. We need not say of the promise, "I hope," or "I think," but "I know," and such knowledge brings satisfaction. Such knowledge fringes every dark cloud with golden hues, dispels the gloom that overspreads the mind, deepens the affections, exalts the faculties, makes the Christian's eye bright with hope, and illumines the pathway to immortality.

Paul exhorted Timothy to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12). But how? We lay hold of salvation the same way the drowning man lays hold on the lifeline or the skydiver lays hold of the parachute—by faith. "Believe on Him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16). And when you have "laid hold" by faith, then go forth to live, go forth to minister in the name of Jesus Christ, for what your life is in God's sight here, it will be in eternity. "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

To sow to the Spirit will not always meet the approval of men. Some will laugh and sneer; temptations will assail and pleasures allure; it may be that friends, and even loved ones, will endeavor to deter you. But listen! Jesus speaks. Weigh every word, and then decide. "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or



wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29).

An old man walking to church with a Bible in his hand was approached. "Good morning, Mr. Price."

"Ah, good morning!" he responded. "I am reading my Father's will as I walk along."

"Well, and what has He left you?" said the friend.

"Why, He has left to me a hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come, life everlasting."

"In the world to come" What a phrase! What a prospect! How it makes the Christian's heart bound with joy. The world to come—heaven—where our Father's throne is established. Where the streets are made of gold. Where the blind will see, and the lame will walk. Where there are pleasures forevermore. Where there will be no more death, sorrow, or pain. And where we will meet the God who saved us.

Reader, will you be there? The loving Father longs for your presence there. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are doing all they can to have you there. Angels in heaven and Christians on earth are praying that you may be there, but you, and you alone, must make the decision. Will you decide to be there? Do so, and all things will be yours. Do so, and faith will give place to sight, prayer to praise, and the pledge of John three-sixteen will unfold into a blissful reality. Till then, keep yourselves in the love of God, remembering that—"The wandering one forsakes, forgets, dishonors; yet repenting, going home, is met with no reproach. 'Welcome, my son!' God's endless love! What will it be when earthly shadows flee away, for all eternity's bright day the unfolding of that love to see!"

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