

Don't Be Condemned

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, December 20, 2015
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

God fully knows and knows fully well that the whole world will not be saved. Our text acknowledges in verse 18 that there are those who do not believe, “he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” But even though God knows this, the Lord loves the world nonetheless and would that all men be saved. “For God did not send His Son in the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

God wants you to be saved. Some of my fellow Calvinists limit the compassion of God by stating that I am too sentimental in my definition of *world*, that the word *world* does not mean world, but something less than the world. They argue it means a sub-category of the world, specifically, the world of the elect. “For God so loved the world *of the elect*” and the rest He didn’t. It is like saying “the world of sports,” or “the world of cooking,” or “the world of woodworking.”

But if the inspired Apostle John meant the world of the elect, why didn’t he say so, for how can one know you’re talking about a world that is far smaller than the whole world unless you designate what kind of world you are speaking about? Since John didn’t name what world he was talking about, why can I not say that John meant “the world of midget basketball” or “the world of underwater basket weaving”? “God so loved the world of midget basketball players that He gave His only begotten Son . . .” Now you must forgive my satirical silliness; we must not allow it to get in the way of my point. The point is this—the text does not give us any reason to believe that God only loved the world of the elect anymore than it tells us that He only loved the world of underwater basket weavers. No one in John’s day would have read the text and thought John was narrowing the word *world* to mean one particular sub-set of the world.

No matter how much linguistic twisting or gymnastics my reformed brothers do, *world* always means *world* unless otherwise stated.

And actually, the context will not allow you to honestly redefine world because in verse 19 John defined the word *world* not as “the world of the elect.” If he had he would have made a most serious theological mistake, one that cannot be—that some of God’s elect will perish.

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)

The light has penetrated the world and men who live in this world rejected the light. You cannot have the word *world* mean the elect since this would mean that some of the elect “loved darkness rather than light,” which means they perished.

Therefore, we are back to only one conclusion, that God so loved the world, yes, even those within the world who did not love the light but loved darkness and rejected the Light because their deeds were evil. Yes, God even loved them. God so loved the world. Period.

On this Sunday before Christmas it is good and right that we spend some time meditating on God’s love and the gift He has given us. It is right that we spend some time this morning removing the cold, calculated sterileness of a cleaned up manger scene and get right to the issue. What’s the issue? God loves us. He loves us! And He doesn’t want you to perish.

Let’s look first at the fact that God gave us His Son.

I. God Gave Us His Son

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”

Although in verse 17 John uses the word *send*, God did more than sent Jesus, He gave us Jesus. There’s a huge difference. If I said to you, “I’m going to send my son to your home this afternoon,” that means one thing. It means something completely different to say, “I’m giving you my son.”

To say, “I’m going to send” and “I’m going to give,” are two different things. God gave us His Son and therefore He sent Him. What does it mean that He gave us His Son?

A. God Relinquished His Son.

What does it mean to give? If you were to look it up in the dictionary you would find that it is to voluntarily present something or someone to another without seeking compensation. From the word give we get gift. God has given us His Son. But it’s more than that.

It is to release something or someone into the care of another. When you give presents in a few days, you’re going to relinquish something into another’s care to do with as they so please.

God gave us His Son. He relinquished Him to us to do with as we saw fit. He released His Son to the womb of the virgin and then when He was born into her motherly nurture He relinquished fatherhood to an unknown carpenter named Joseph of Nazareth. To these two people He gave the care of the Beloved Son. When Jesus became an adult, God gave the Son to the world so mankind could do with Him as they pleased. And they did that. They did with Him as they saw fit.

They maligned Him. They ridiculed Him. They blasphemed Him. They tormented Him. They brutalized Him. They killed Him.

“For God so loved the world that He gave...” No strings attached, the Son was placed in our hands, hands of men who were hateful and spiteful toward Him. The Father let it happen because He gave.

God gave up His Son to you and I.

I ask you this morning to reflect thoughtfully, how have you treated the Son given to you? How have you treated this Jesus? Is He just a name? Is He just a celebrity from the past? Is He just an icon? How have you treated this Jesus? How have you responded to the gift given to you?

You might not be a Christian but you too have been given a gift. This is what the text says, *“For God so loved the world...”* there’s no exclusions here. There’s no certain designations or sub-categories. To you, to me, to us all He has given the Son to do with as we see fit. He has been relinquished and released into our care. How do you care for Jesus?

Do you honor Him? Do you exalt Him to His rightful place in your life? Do you call Him Lord and Master and follow Him as such? Or do you give disregard Him, neglect Him? Do you give Him your leftovers? Do you confine Him to the dark corners of your mind, only to think of Him when you’re here and have to be reminded of Him?

He’s yours to do with as you see fit.

B. God Gave His Unique One.

The Only Begotten.

The word *only* harkens back to Abraham when God came to him and said He wanted his son. God tested him concerning his only son, *“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”* (Genesis 22:2)

Abraham passed the test, as we know. He was willing because he loved God more than his only son, so he offered him up in obedience. Thankfully God stayed Abraham’s hand and did not make him follow through. It’s amazing what God said to Abraham, *“Now I know you fear God because*

you did not withhold your only son from Me.” And now God, not asking anything of any man that He wouldn’t do Himself, offers up His Son for us. This is amazing.

The only begotten, “one of a kind.” That’s what those words literally mean. Unique. Why is Jesus one of a kind? Are we not all sons of God? Doesn’t the Bible say that anybody who believes on Him, to them He gave the right and power to become sons of God? Isn’t Jesus called the first of many born? Are we not all the children of God? Why is Jesus the *only* Son?

Because He’s the only begotten. The word *begotten* means to *generate*. When you read the generations, “David begot Solomon, Solomon begot...” you’re looking at generations. David *generated* Solomon.

To be the only begotten means Jesus is the only one who has been generated from the Father. Now we’re entering into the mystery of the Godhead because the Bible also says in John 1:1 that the Word, Jesus, was with God in the beginning and that He Himself *is God*. He goes on to say that nothing was made except by Him.

Jesus was not made, because if there is something out there who made Jesus, that means Jesus didn’t make everything but John is specific and says He made everything. So how can Jesus be generated and yet not made? It’s easy and difficult.

It’s easy in this sense: God always was. And God always saw Himself perfectly as He is. This image of Himself is the Son. Since God always has been the Son always has been. Here it becomes difficult because I cannot explain how this is so. This is the mystery. Yet the text says it and it must be so. Jesus, the eternal God, yet comes from the Father. That means that when God gave us His only Son He gave us Himself.

Because Christ is the Father and the Father is Christ. Again, I understand why you don’t get that; I don’t get it. I’m struggling trying to explain it and you’re struggling trying to understand while I’m explaining something I don’t even know what I’m talking about.

So what must we do? We bow in absolute worship and our ignorance becomes worship to the Lord because He is so beyond us.

C. God Gave Us His Son Because He Loved Us.

Why would God give up Jesus to us? There’s no other explanation other than that He loves us. You and I would never give up our children.

Spurgeon loved to tell the story that told of the fondness of parents for their children. A famine in the East brought a father and mother, because of starvation, to the precipice of a horrific decision. They were reduced to absolute starvation and within days of dying. The only possibility of preserving the life of the family was to sell one of the children into slavery. The cries of their

hungry children begging for bread became so unbearable that they actually entertained the idea of selling one of their children to save the lives of the rest. They had four sons, but the question was which of the sons should they sell? They couldn't see giving up their eldest; he was the first-born, they couldn't imagine selling him. The mother said she would never part with the second son because he was so much like his father that he seemed an exact reproduction of him. The third was very much like the mother that the father said he would sooner die than giving up this son; and as for the fourth, he was their Benjamin, their last, their darling, and they could not part with him. They concluded that it were better for them all to die together than willingly part with any one of their children.

Here they had four sons; they could have given up one. But they couldn't do it. God had one and He gave.

When you read that you have to wonder, *Lord, do You love me more than You love Jesus?* It would appear to be so. There's no way that can be true but it surely seems so when the Almighty was willing to give up His only Son for a wretch like me. A wretch like you. Oh how much He loves us!

Why does He love us? How can you explain this? John doesn't try, all He says is God loves you and He wants to save you.

D. God Wants to Save.

“whoever believes in Him will not perish...”

This is why He's been sent, this is why He's been given. So that you would not die in your sins. God wants to save you because He loves you. This is who He is. When asked what His name was, He responds to Moses, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). It's His very name.

The love of God is manifested toward each and every one of us in kindnesses and displays of goodness, which the Sacred text says ought to lead you to repentance. Listen to the Apostle Paul,

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)

God loves you and He wants to save you. So what does He do? He is good to you who do not respond in kind. Every one of us do this. God is so good to me in ways in which I could never repay or ever deserve and those acts of love, those acts of kindness, are not meant to do anything but draw me to Him.

So today I speak to people who are not believers and I plead for your attention for a few more moments. Please listen to me. God is absolutely good to you. Despite all of the difficulties, despite your home environment, despite what you lack in life, God has been extremely good to each and

every one of us because He loves us. Even old Israel, old stiff-necked, stubborn, rebellious Israel, when God had to judge them He did it unwillingly. Listen to the Psalmist.

“But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, And did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, And did not stir up all His wrath;” (Psalms 78:38)

And when God had to bring great calamity and judgment on Judea and Jerusalem specifically, Jeremiah in his Lamentations shows us that even in God’s judgment there is much mercy and kindness.

“Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies.” (Lamentations 3:32)

Now again we enter into the realm of mystery knowing there is a realm of the elect. There are those chosen before the foundation of the earth but they are not the only ones God loves. When you watch the Savior as a man on this earth, you see the Father. You see the heart of God displayed. Matthew records that “when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

When He enters into Jerusalem for the last time, knowing that city and its leaders will reject Him, what does He do? Does He pronounce judgment on them? Does He in righteous anger blast them, call them what they rightfully deserve to be called? Listen to what He does. Watch Him break down in tears crying, “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How I would have gathered you as a hen would gather her chicks, but you would not.” He loved the very ones who executed Him and prayed, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.”

After He was flogged, beaten, He was made to carry the cross, a burden which He could not bear physically and He stumbled. A woman came to Him and says, “Blessed are the breasts that gave you nurse.” What does the Lord do? He says to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children,” as if He had no concern for His own misery. He loves us.

If you’re not a believer in Jesus Christ this Christmas season, would you not acknowledge with me this much, that all of the good and fair things of this life that you’ve been given to enjoy has been given by the hand of God? Would you at least acknowledge that? How many of you have been a recipient of answered prayer and yet today you’re still not yet a believer? I don’t say that to condemn you, I say that just to show you how good God has been to you in spite of your rejection of Him?

He loves you. That’s the only explanation. Therefore, because He doesn’t want you to perish, He has given you His Son that if you would believe you would not perish.

But be warned. If you remain in unbelief you will be condemned. The text is certain here

II. By Unbelief We Condemn Ourselves

Not even God's love will withhold this certain judgment.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:17, 18)

What does the text say? The text says if you reject God's lovingkindness to you in the person of Jesus Christ it's not you *will* be condemned but you already are. Here again the mind reels in misunderstanding and confusion.

A. If God Loves Us, How Can He Judge Us?

If God is as good as you say He is, how can He condemn me to this place you call hell with everlasting torment? My friend, I suggest to you that's not the right question. The right question is: Why should the Father receive you? Why should God forgive us? Why should He be concerned about us? Why must He have given us His Son? Why should He love us at all?

What is the Father to do? What do you want Him to do?! Should He bind you against your will and make you come home with Him? Should He, contrary to your desires, forgive you of your sins and make you stay at His right hand? No, not at all. There is neither love or justice if He were to do this.

I say that hell is God's answer to the sinner's desire. Rejection of the gift of God says one thing and one thing only: I want nothing to do with Your gift or the One who gave it. Leave me alone.

I'm not trying to be dramatic. I'm choking back tears every second because at this moment I feel overwhelmed by what I am saying to you. I think I have a glimpse of some gravity that you yet do not see. God so loves you and pours out blessing after blessing on you. Even in the difficulties, the things you call "problems" have been God's goodness as signs and warnings pleading for you to stop and turn to Him. Yet you have refused them. You let those warnings go by unheeded. You reject His loving cry.

What do you want Him to do? Answer that in your own heart.

You continue to reject Him so God will eventually give you what you want: life without Him. This is hell.

There are those I know who want nothing to do with God, they don't even believe in His existence. Then there are others who want God's blessings and kindnesses but they don't want anything to do with Him. But hell is the absence of both, both God and His goodness. It's not

just the absence of His presence or the absence of people reminding you how much you need Jesus, it's the absence of all of His love, His mercies, His goodness, the very thing you rejoice in today—life. It's taken away and you live a death. It's not even called life. It's called eternal death. It's the absence of everything good and God is everything that is good.

I'm telling you, heaven would be worse than hell for you if you were to enter without a heart change. You would be more miserable in heaven than hell and that's not to make hell sound appealing to you. The torments of that place I cannot begin to describe. They are created by a mind far more intelligent than mine. All I want you to hear me say today is this, dear friend, you will have left God no recourse but to pass the sentence you have already passed upon yourself.

Notice the text, "...he who does not believe is condemned already."

B. The Unbeliever Condemns Himself.

You have passed judgment on yourself. You are the judge, the jury, and the executioner. You have said to the Lord, "This is my desire, to live life according to my agenda. I reject Your's because I don't think You know what really satisfies me. I don't believe You're as good as this Book says You are. I don't believe You're as good as my mom and dad say You are. I don't believe You're as good as the preacher says You are. I believe I'm sufficient." And God says that is a sentence of judgment. And you leave God, who is loving and also just, no other choice.

This is better seen in Acts 13:46. On the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas they came upon a city called Antioch-Pisidia, where Paul as always went into the synagogue and preached the Gospel to the Jewish people and Gentile proselytes. The popularity of Paul and Barnabas grew where they were more famous than the leaders of the synagogue and they grew jealous and rejected the Gospel.

"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles." (Acts 13:46)

This is the same sentiment of our text. You've judged yourself unworthy of eternal life. It's the same thing that John is saying. You don't believe so you've already condemned yourself. You're already condemned because you don't consider yourself worthy. Don't read those words thinking, *I don't see myself worthy*. Because those Jews certainly thought they were worthy of heaven. No doubt some of you who are not believers in Christ, who are not living in obedience to Him or following His ways and agenda, yet you say you are a good person and worthy of God's heaven. That's not the way it's to be interpreted.

It means you have rejected the Gospel and the effect is the same as if you had condemned yourself and called yourself unworthy. That's what he's saying. You've already judged yourself and brought the condemnation upon yourself. You've rejected the Gospel and that's the only remedy.

Listen to the author of Hebrews,

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,”

There’s no other Savior. And if you reject the Savior who has died, where will you turn? There is no other. All that remains is,

“...a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If you disobeyed God and broke some of the capital laws in the Old Testament you were stoned on the testimonies of two or three witnesses. God says that’s pretty bad but here we’re dealing with something more severe than Old Testament law. We’re dealing with Jesus. We’re dealing with “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”

Let me make sure you understand. Sometimes the words of Scripture are written in such a way that we often miss the message. The writer of Hebrews is saying that when you reject the Son of God it’s as if you were stomping on Jesus and you count His blood, shed for your forgiveness, as something as common as the asphalt that you walk on. You disregard it’s effectualness in removing your sins and you’ve insulted the Spirit of God who is the spirit of grace.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26-29, 31)

I don’t want to end, though, on a negative. I want to go back to verse 16.

III. By Faith We Receive the Son

Right here, right now. God doesn’t intend for you to die in your sins. He intends for you to believe.

To the skeptic who thinks I’ve made God a contradiction, please listen. You’re thinking, “If God wants me to be saved, then is He willing something against His own wishes if He does not save me?” All I can say is that it is wise for God to wish for you to be saved but not allow you to be saved. How? I do not know. The sovereign, omniscient God cannot be understood by this finite brain. God does love you and wants you to be saved, but if you reject His Son He will have no choice but to follow through with the sentencing of condemnation you have pronounced upon yourself.

“... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

“He who believes in Him is not condemned ...”

If the Father has given the Son, then we should receive the Son? How do we do so? By faith.

A. God Does Not Believe For Us.

“... whoever believes ...”

Those two words specify that it's not God who does the believing for you. It's *you*. You must place your confidence and trust in Him. He will not do it for you. Yes, it's true, the Bible says that God will grant you faith as a gift that you may believe, but He will not exercise it for you.

If your faith is so small you don't know if God will receive you if you came to Him, take what little hope you have and cling to it. Believe, even with that small mustard seed-sized faith, and know that God will not reject you.

I couldn't believe the day I was saved. I didn't think He could save me. My prayer was, “God, You're a God of justice, I've got to go to hell and pay for the sins I've committed.” There was no faith in my prayer, yet God showed up that morning and did what I couldn't believe Him for. How? Because I received what He was offering me.

He's offering you eternal life. *That means nothing to me, you say, it's just religious jargon.* Oh dear friend, it's not “heaven in the sky by and by,” it's now. Life now. It's a quality of life that happens the moment you believe. Let me ask you, are you truly happy? Would you say joy and peace characterize your life? Would you say you're well-balanced and your life is in complete order? Would you say you're completely satisfied? There's not a one who could honestly say such. Not a one.

But those who have received the gift by faith, they can say, “It is well with my soul.” “Though Satan should buffet, let this blest assurance control,” what is that? “That Christ has regarded my helpless estate and shed His own blood for my soul.” That's what you receive.

B. To Believe is to Receive.

To believe is to receive and to receive is to believe. To believe in the Bible doesn't mean you believe the facts that there was a cross and an empty tomb or a birth and a manger or a Messiah and He's coming again. It means more than your mental understanding. It means you receive Christ, trusting Him with yourself. It's a commitment.

When you're sick, because of your confidence (i.e., faith) in the physician, you do what he tells you. You commit your health to your physician.

Some of you have financial advisors and they're planning your retirement for you and you put your confidence in what they say, you're putting your financial future in somebody else's hands. That's a commitment. That's faith. That's to receive. That's all God is asking.

If you would receive Christ at this moment, believing, trusting, committing your life to Jesus Christ, then you will not perish and the sentence of condemnation would be lifted and God will pronounce you justified, accepted. This is the hope of those who have received Jesus.

As we contemplate this holiday, I pray you contemplate it correctly, think about it rightly, and that you understand God's love is pursuing you. He's hunting after you, seeking you, and, as far as I'm concerned, if you're listening to me, there is still hope for you. I believe you're here today not because you chose to come here today. I believe there is something beyond that in the realm of secrecy and mystery, a divine Providence, that might have used motives of this world and your flesh to get you here.

Out of your carnality and selfishness maybe you came to make someone else happy, I don't care what the motive was, behind it all is a God of love pursuing you, chasing after you. He wants you because He wants to love you. It's hard to love somebody who won't receive love. But once that person opens up their heart to receive it, now you can love them fully and completely, more than you could beforehand.

God wants to love you and do things for you that is unimaginable but you must receive. You must receive the gift—the love of God in the Son. Reject it and you've sentenced yourself. Receive it and you've allowed God to love you fully, completely, infinitely. May God have mercy on us. Amen.