

## John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

This is probably the most well known verse by believers & non-believers alike. I believe there is more to this verse than we have traditionally been taught. It is interesting to note how this verse portrays God’s love for us. He loved the world that He gave His only Son. God loved us so much that He gave up Himself to die for us, that we might be redeemed and conformed to His image. “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) “But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8) This is truly an amazing love we have received from the Most High God. John 3:16 gives us an example of what love really looks like. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to Love the Lord your God with all the heart, mind & soul and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself. (Matt 22:36-40) I like the way one artist writes it: “He came from heaven to earth, to show us the way. From the earth, to the cross our debt he paid, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) The way is to the cross, to the grave, and then to the sky. The word of God says, “By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” (1 John 2:5, 6) “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life (soul) shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” (Luke 9:23,24) If we are to walk as Jesus walked and be obedient—even obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross—we also must pick up our cross. This is where we go to die to our flesh (sinful nature) and be raised in newness of life and in the likeness of His resurrection.

After the cross comes the grave; A.W. Tozer once said, “you know one thing about a man carrying his cross up a hill, He was not coming back.” This is where we are led by the Spirit of God to put to death the deeds of the body (flesh) (Rom 8:13) “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.” (Rom 6:3-9) When we are baptized with Christ into His death and are buried with Him, our old man, self is crucified with Him. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” (Gal 2:20)

After the grave, praise the Lord, we do not stay there but move forward and go to the sky. “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col 3:1-3) “If we died with Christ we will also be raised with Him. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom 8:11) “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:4-6)

We are now seated with Christ in heavenly places. This is the way and the truth and the life that Christ came to show us. Jesus says that we are to Strive to “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matt 7:13,14) “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” (1Pe 2:21-24)

This is the example that Christ showed us that we might follow. Did He not say, “You shall be holy, for I am Holy?” (See 1 Peter 1:13-16) The walk He has set out before us is characterized by holiness and obedience to the truth. Just as Jesus learned obedience and was perfected through sufferings, so we also must walk in this manner. “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” (1Pe 4:1-2) “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” (Heb 5:8) “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.” (Heb 2:9-10) To stay on that narrow and difficult path will require suffering in the flesh, resisting sin to the point of bloodshed and choosing to obey the Father and not our own selfish, sinful desires. (Eph 2:3; Rom 6:12)

One might be thinking: this is impossible I cannot live this out, nor can anyone except Jesus, the Son of God. You are right. YOU can't, but if the Spirit of God is in you and you are in the faith (2 Cor 13:15) Christ can in you. “With man this is impossible, but with God ALL things are possible.” (Matt 19:25, 26) This is a precious and magnificent promise. (See also 2 Pet 1:2-11) “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” (Eze 36:25-27) He says that He will cause us to obey. It is “‘not by Might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord.” (Zec 4:6) It is by grace through faith that we are being saved. (Eph 2:8, 9) That is: the true grace that brings salvation, “instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit 2:11, 12)

Well, I said a prayer once when I was younger and go to church isn't that enough? "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.” (1 Jon 2:3-5) “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” (Jam 2:19)

In John 3:16 we read that whoever 'believes' in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. What does it mean to *believe* and what does that look like? Even the demons believe and we know they aren't going to heaven. We need to have the faith that results in works (obedience). (Jas 2:22) "If a man says he has faith (or say he believes) but has no works. Can that faith save a man?" (Jas 2:14) No, because that faith is dead and is useless. (Jas 2:17, 20, 26) James provides us with an example of faith being completed or perfected by working with works: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,' and he was called the friend of God." (Jam 2:21-23) "You see that a man is justified by works (obedience) and not by faith alone." (Jas 2:24) "For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Rom 10:10)

One might now say, "we are not saved by works but by faith." This is an absolute truth that I am very thankful for. Yet I think the weight of this statement hinges on our definition of faith. We need obedience to the Word and to be led by the Spirit of God. Obedience is not legalism (salvation by works). If we continue to read John chapter 3 and make it to the end of the chapter we can see an important attribute of believing in Jesus. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey (believe) the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36) So if you believe in the Son then you will be obeying Him. Here are a few more scriptures that show the necessity of obedience to Jesus: Hebrew 5:9; 2 Thess 11:8; Acts 5:32. This obedience is not something we can attain and boast in, but is something that comes from faith and is a gift of God. (Eph 2:8, 9) Paul says, by the works of the Law, no flesh shall be justified (Gal 2:16ff) Again, let me make it clear; it is the *true* grace of God which leads to the obedience of the faith. (Rom 1:5; 16:26) Therefore, my beloved brethren, let us lay aside ALL sin and weights which so easily entangle us and press on towards the upward call of Christ Jesus. Keeping our eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith, so we might endure the cross, despising the shame and be seated with Him at the right hand throne of God.