

# A LOVE FOR THE SOULS OF MEN

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Perhaps one of the most familiar and most often quoted Bible verses is John 3:16. The verse says, "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." Consider this verse from God's perspective. God created man in his own image and after his own likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). God is the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), not just of "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23) but "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. 16:22; 27:16). His love for the creatures made in his image is greater than his creatures can fathom. The Psalmist declared, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psa. 8:3-4). God's love for man is so great that even though he is so pure and holy that he cannot look upon evil and iniquity (Hab. 1:13), yet he has commended his love toward a lost humanity. Paul wrote, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Many people wrongly insist that because of God's great love he could never punish them for their sins. Be not mistaken, God will by no means clear guilty sinners. The Psalms say, "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity," and "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. 5:5, 7:11). Moses wrote that God is "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. 34:7). The context bears out that God is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth (Ex. 34:6). And, God will not "clear the guilty," but he will pardon iniquity and sin (Ex. 34:8-9).

Men trying to be holy and trying to imitate Christ find sin repulsive. Often the mistake is made of desiring the punishment of God to be brought down upon the wicked because there is no argument but that they really deserve it. James and John once thought this way as recorded in Luke 9:51-56, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come

down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village." John 3:16 needs to be considered from God's perspective if "a love for the souls of men" is ever to be cultivated strongly enough for Christians to give of their time, their talents, and their treasure to win them.

## **TIME**

Think of the time God has invested in the interest of wicked, sinful men to bring about their salvation. Before time began, God purposed to bring his Son into the world to save the lost. Paul wrote, "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). The twenty-five hundred years of the Patriarchal period of Old Testament history and the fifteen hundred years of the Mosaic period of Old Testament history were designed to serve as a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). He remains "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). God gave and is continuing to give time which shows "a love for the souls of men."

One test of the Christian which shows whether or not he loves God and the souls of men is the use made of time. The apostle Matthew wrote, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37). Heart, soul, and mind is a description of the eternal part of man. "All" is a quantitative word expressive of the degree of love God requires from those who serve him. Christians need to cultivate to a greater degree their love for God and for the souls of men.

## **TALENT**

The ability and wisdom God displayed in providing the plan of salvation is so marvelous the prophets and even the angels desire to investigate it. Peter wrote, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Pet. 1:10-12). Talent in the form of the wisdom of God in saving man

exceeds man's comprehension and can only find expression as God has revealed his will to man. Paul said, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:9-10).

Christians have different ability levels. Paul described it in I Corinthians 12 as the body of Christ or the church of Christ having many members yet not all of them having the same use or function. However, each member is expected to perform to the best of his talent level or ability. Paul said, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Rom. 1:15). The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also teaches personal responsibility and accountability for doing the will of God. What the Christian does with the talent God has given him mirrors the love he has for God and the souls of men.

## **TREASURE**

Heaven was undeniably robbed of its richest treasure when Christ left the celestial regions to enter the world as a babe in Bethlehem. Yet, Philippians 2:6-7 says, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." "God gave."

John 3:16 viewed from the perspective of God means giving, and following the example God set it means giving that which is nearest and dearest to the heart. Since God gave his Son, man should not hesitate or question to give his best in return. There are two parts to the presentation of the gospel: Sending and going. Paul wrote, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:14-15). While everyone cannot preach and teach (Jas. 3:1), all must be ready to give an answer of the hope within (I Pet. 3:15). And, all are instructed to support the preaching and teaching of the word of God to the salvation of the souls of men everywhere (I Cor. 16:1-2). God expects Christians to give their earthly treasures to enrich heaven with the souls of men, one of which is worth more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26).

When John 3:16 is viewed from the perspective of God, Christians will rightly see themselves as instruments of God's will to be used in getting the soul saving

message of the gospel of Christ into the hearts and minds of lost and dying men and women. The Savior said, “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” (Jn. 3:16).