

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12



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JOHN 3:16

By Jason Longstreth

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

This passage is probably the most well-known passage in the entire Bible. In nearly every denomination (at least protestant), John 3:16 stands as the centerpiece of their doctrine and practice. This one verse is often characterized as the epitome of the Gospel message. And although it is a tremendously powerful and beautiful passage, it is mistakenly thought by many to be the entirety of the Gospel as well. In fact, some have even suggested that the rest of the Bible is unnecessary! I’m not kidding. A recent Tennessee newspaper article contained the following statement: *“If all the Bible were lost except John 3:16 we would have all the scripture we need in order to be saved and to go home to God when we die.”*

That comment just amazes me! First of all, it seems that God went through a lot of unnecessary trouble to give us sixty-six books in the Bible if all we really needed was one (the Gospel of John). In addition, He gave us twenty ‘extra’ chapters in that particular book. He also gave us thirty-six verses in a chapter that only required one. Certainly, this is a severe case of overkill. But beyond that, it also seems that all of these superfluous books, chapters and verses would not only prove to be unnecessary, but

distracting. If all we needed to know was one verse, why confuse us with all of this other information? Why dilute the message? Why run the risk of having us spend so much time reading the other, unnecessary passages that we overlook what truly matters?

Surely we can see that God would not have done this! Instead, any claim that John 3:16 is all we need is not based on what the Bible says, but is instead an effort to promote a particular doctrine or doctrines. Namely, salvation by faith only and the impossibility of apostasy (once saved, always saved). This is not what John 3:16 teaches.

John 3:16 reveals to us the love of God, but also demonstrates the faith of the obedient believer. It does not suggest that we are saved by 'faith only', but instead shows the working faith of one who is following Jesus. This individual would be a baptized believer, a disciple. How do I know this? Consider the context of the passage.

Nearly everyone can quote John 3:16, but how many people know what was said in verses 14–15? **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”** Here, a connection is made between Jesus and the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. This is a reference to the events of Numbers 21, where the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people because of their sins (v. 6). Moses was then instructed to make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard (v. 8). If the people reacted with obedient faith, by looking on the serpent, they were saved (vv. 8–9). Notice the role of obedient faith.

If you go back even further into John 3, you read where the Lord instructed Nicodemus concerning salvation and the kingdom of God. In verse 3 He told him, **“unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** In verse 5 He expanded upon this idea by saying, **“unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”** Both of these passages are talking about an obedient faith—a faith that causes us to act upon and follow God’s word and His commandments. Are these passages superfluous or unnecessary? Or, are they essential in understanding what we must do to **‘see the kingdom’** or **‘enter the kingdom’**? Jesus said they were essential.

Before we conclude our discussion of this passage, I want us to go to one more verse in John 3. This time, turn to the end of the chapter, the last verse. In John 3:36 we read, **“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”** This final verse shows us once again that God has been discussing obedient faith throughout this chapter. How? By contrasting those who believe in the Son with those who do not obey the Son. The kind of faith that saves us is the faith that works through obedience.

Where does that leave us? The context of John 3:16 suggests that obedience to God is required if we desire eternal life. The verses preceding the passage teach this. The new birth implies this. The conclusion to the chapter states this. Thus, it should not be surprising that those who desire to teach salvation by faith only would ignore the context. They say John 3:16 is all we need because they

wish it was all that we had. They take it out of its context and make it teach something God never intended. The faith of John 3:16 is a faith that obeys, the faith of the baptized believer, the faith of a disciple. Only that kind of faith will save us.

NOTES: _____

“IN THE LAST DAYS...” STUDIES IN BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY (LESSONS BY JASON LONGSTRETH)	
Thur. 7:00pm	The Importance of Eschatology
Fri. 7:00pm	An Examination of Typology
Sat. 7:00pm	The Kingdom of God
Sun. 9:30am	The Salvation of Israel
Sun. 10:30am	The Resurrection
Sun. 6:00pm	Realized Eschatology

**“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**