

The Comfort of a Father's Love

In my most recent series, we spent some time in John 3:16, where we were reminded of the blessing of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. We looked, in some depth, at how this verse speaks of God's love for his children. In our application, I shared with us the biblical truth of how God's love for his children should inform our love for others.

In this new series, I want to touch briefly on that same verse as it pertains to God's love and then continue to fill out John's thoughts on the saving gospel of Jesus Christ as it is given to us in John 3:17-21. Let's begin by summarizing John 3:16 by noting that God's love is *a comforting love*.

We know all too well that there are times in our lives when we may struggle with the negative things that are going on around us. At this point, I'm not referring to the current conflict that's being fought in the Middle East. I'm primarily speaking of the day-today difficulties that we can all face at different times.

Some struggle in their marriages or with times when children just don't seem to care to obey, no matter how hard we're seeking to be loving and patient. Difficulties with bosses and co-workers or with being able to pay all the bills that can seem to keep piling up. Worries about health concerns of our own or loved ones. Things that just don't always make sense keep swirling round us.

These are the days that we may be tempted to throw up our hands and give up! More than we may sometimes realize, we fight ongoing battles with the world, the flesh and the devil. In these times when the battle is confusing — and especially fierce — we need to be reminded of God's comforting love.

Dr. Bryan Chapell, former president of Covenant Theological Seminary, once told of a friend of the family named Julie, who recounted an event that happened in her childhood. Although she couldn't fully understand it at the time, she came to understand and appreciate it much later in her life. This specific event happened in the days before cell phones and before many families had more than one telephone in the home.

On this particular evening, the young children had gone to bed. Most everyone in the family was in their room except her father. He stood in the dark, in the hallway on the phone, talking to her brother, David, long distance from Vietnam. As she paused to listen from a safe distance away, she remembered that, from what she could hear, it was very clear to her that her brother was scared. He had seen things that had enraged and confused him. His dad was half a world away standing in the darkness and listening to the fear and angst of his son. What could he say to his troubled son, who was in the middle of a confusing war, to bring him comfort and enable him to keep functioning as he must do?

In recalling the story, although she was sure that other words must have been spoken, all Julie could remember was that their father would simply wait for her brother to pause in the gush of complaint, confusion and fear and then he would say, “I love you, David.”

A few minutes passed, more information was given, and their father would say, “I love you, David.” Then another few minutes and again, “I love you, David.” All during this telephone conversation, their father simply affirmed his love for his son.

Julie says that she remembers that night vividly all these years later, not just because she knew that something was very wrong with her brother but also because she learned how powerful and necessary it was for a loving father to affirm his love — and certainly in a time of crisis.

And we all need that, don't we? We need to know that we're loved — not as merely sentiment or emotion but a love that truly listens and wants what's best for us always. This is the love that God gives and it's the only love that can bring genuine and lasting comfort.

John 3:16 is a very touching reminder of God's comforting love for his children.

As we move forward in the passage, notice also the comfort expressed in Verse 17: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Even as we hear the words that Christ did not come to condemn the world we may think, for example, of John 9:39: “Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world.’” I could also reference 1 Peter 2:7 and Revelation 20:11-15. John Calvin rightly notes that these scriptures “arise from a different cause; for they who reject the grace offered in (Christ) deserve to find him the Judge and Avenger of contempt so unworthy and base.”

As difficult as it is, the Scriptures affirm that those who continue to reject Christ will eventually be judged.

With this truth in mind look with me in Verse 18: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

The first phrase in this verse is very comforting: “Whoever believes in (Jesus) is not condemned.” The apostle Paul states this same thing in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” And yet, even though this is true, the second phrase is as sobering as the first is comforting: “... but whoever does not believe is condemned already.”

We know from the overall teaching of the Bible that mankind is born into this world in sin. This fact is just the opposite of those who would teach that mankind is born neutral, having done nothing right or wrong and therefore is inherently able, in and of themselves, to choose what's right or wrong in any and every situation. Of course, that's not the testimony of Scripture.

Because of our sin nature, apart from God's grace, our choices would never be choices that are meant to honor Christ. Therefore, according to John's teaching in this passage, it matters what we believe — or, more properly, it matters who we believe in. The Scriptures teach that God is sovereign over all things, along with the fact that we make real choices that we're responsible for (e.g., Daniel 4:34-35; John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8-10). The most important choice that anyone can make is to choose the love of God in Christ Jesus. Are you discouraged? Are you struggling? Are your fears threatening to overwhelm you? God's special love, given in Jesus Christ to all those who trust him by faith, is very comforting no matter what you're facing.

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