Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Belief, Judgment, and Eternal Life
Scripture: John 3:15-21
Code: 43-17

Now for this morning we come to John chapter 3. Apologies to those of you who have come to visit us this morning. You're getting in, as people often do, on part 3 of a discussion of John chapter 3, verses 11 to 21. You're getting in on part 3, which means you've missed the first two parts, and although I'm greatly tempted to go back over all of that because I hate for anybody to miss anything, I'm going to restrain myself at this point and encourage you if you want to listen to those, they are available, gty.org, and you can download them there. But I do want to draw back to John chapter 3 and just remind you that this is really a remarkable moment in the life and ministry of Jesus.

His great enemies through His entire life were the religious leaders of Israel. Here He was, the Son of God, the Messiah, the One they had all been waiting for and His greatest enemies were the religious teachers of Israel—the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the rabbis—everybody who was in spiritual influence and spiritual power turned against Him. And it is then remarkable that there is one Pharisee who seeks Him out, a man by the name of Nicodemus. He wants to talk to Jesus and he comes to Him, as chapter 3 begins, at night. And he comes with a very, very profound ache in his heart. He has "sinner's worry." He is full of anxiety, fear, dread.

Why? Because he's a hypocrite. All Pharisees were hypocrites. In Matthew 23 Jesus called them hypocrites repeatedly, time after time after time after time. Said they were like whitewashed tombs; they looked good on the outside and on the inside were full of dead men's bones. They were hypocrites. Hypocrites know they're hypocrites because they know their own hearts. They know that what they're doing on the outside has no correlation to who they are on the inside. Jesus said that they were sons of hell themselves who made more sons of hell by the influence they had through their teaching of others.

One of those sons of hell, a man named Nicodemus, is profoundly burdened and he's an important man. According to history, he's one of the three wealthiest men in Jerusalem. He is *the* teacher in Israel. He is the elevated and most noble, and maybe the most respected, of all the teachers of Judaism in its apostate form at that time. He's a member of the Supreme Court of Israel. He's ascended to that level. He is a very important figure with a huge, huge fear in his heart. He doesn't know God. He has no assurance of heaven. He does not believe that he is reconciled to God. He's full of angst and fear, and he comes to Jesus in the hope that maybe Jesus can tell him what's missing because he's convinced that Jesus is a teacher sent from God. That's what he says in chapter 3, the first verse or two: "I know, we know You're a teacher from God because no one can do

what You do unless God is with him." So here is a better teacher than he is. If he's *the* teacher in Israel, he's supposed to have all the information. There's nobody lower than him that might have information that he doesn't have, but here he's met somebody who has to be a more elevated teacher than he is because he's never known anybody to do the miracles that Jesus has done.

So here is his opportunity to get an answer to the hypocrisy that has marked his entire life. So he comes to Jesus and here we find Jesus evangelizing a Pharisee. Here we find Jesus evangelizing a very elevated religious leader. Therefore what Jesus says to this man is highly instructive for us.

Now backing away from that which is the setting for chapter 3, the message of Christianity has always been this, that everybody in the world is headed for eternal hell to be punished forever for their sins—everyone. However, there is heaven. There is eternal heaven of joy and bliss and peace and satisfaction and fulfillment forever. How does one escape hell and get to heaven? That's the message of Christianity. And the answer is by faith, not by works, but by faith, not by religion but by believing. That's the message of Christianity, "For by grace are you saved through faith, not of works." It's not about your morality, it's not about your virtue, it's not about your philanthropy, not about your ceremonies, rituals, religious activities. The only way to escape hell and enter heaven is by believing, believing by faith. And faith has always been God's way. If you question that, think back about twenty minutes ago to when I was reading Hebrews 11, "by faith...by faith...by faith...by faith," one after another, after another; they all lived in faith, believing the promises of God. It's always been by faith. Go back to Genesis 15:6, go back to the very father of the Jews, a man named Abraham, and you read this, "Abraham believed in the Lord, he believed in the Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness." All the Lord wanted out of Abraham to declare him righteous was belief, faith in Him. Abraham believed God and for that, God gave Abraham His own righteousness as a covering, forgiving him all sin, making him His eternal child, granting him everlasting life simply on the basis of faith.

Paul makes that the whole point, doesn't he, in Romans 4 and Romans 5, how that Abraham was justified by faith, declared righteous by God because he believed. That's always been the biblical message.

In Hosea, the prophet sums it up, "The just shall live by faith." The righteousness comes by faith, not by works. In Isaiah 55, the prophet offers an invitation, "Ho! Every one that thirsts, everyone that is hungry, come eat, come drink, come buy wine and bread without money and without cost." The free gift of divine satisfaction from God to the heart of the sinner without a price. This has always been God's way to bring sinners to Himself by faith.

Now Nicodemus, according to verse 10 of chapter 3, was *the* teacher in Israel, *the* teacher in Israel. He should have known that truth. He knew all those stories that we read in Hebrews chapter 11. He should have known that God wanted faith. He knew the story of Abraham. He knew Genesis 15:6 that

Abraham was justified, declared righteous by God, purely on the basis of his faith. He knew that. He also knew that God was the One who gave, who granted life to the sinner and forgiveness. He knew that God as a pardoning God. He knew the prophet had said that. He knew what Isaiah said that if you come to God, He'll wash you and make you clean. He knew God was a Savior. But he was the leader of an apostate form of Judaism. He was a Pharisee. He was devoted to the counterfeit religion. He was devoted to a satanic system that called itself Judaism, attached itself to the Old Testament but taught salvation by morality and salvation by religious works, very much a parallel to Roman Catholicism. The apostle Paul was in the same system and himself a Pharisee when he saw it for what it was—called it manure. He was living in fear because he knew his heart and he knew he was a hypocrite.

So he came to Jesus. And what's on his heart? He wants peace, he wants satisfaction, he wants hope, he wants joy, he wants forgiveness, he wants to be a different man, he wants spiritual reality. So he comes to Jesus hoping that Jesus can take him the next step, probably thinking there's something I'm missing, maybe another thing I need to do or something I need to quit doing and He'll just move me on a step or two to what I don't know.

And so, Jesus addresses the issue of his heart. Now he never says what he's thinking, but he doesn't need to. How does chapter 2 end? "Many believed in Him but He was not committing Himself to them because He knew what was in them." No one needed to tell Jesus what was in the heart or mind of a man because He knew what was in man. So He reads his mind. Yes, Nicodemus believed. He and a lot of others believed, but what did they believe? Verse 2, "They believed that Jesus was a teacher from God"; that's as far as their faith went. That's not enough to save. But what's in His heart is this anxiety over his spiritual condition, and Jesus reads his heart and reads his mind and in chapter 3 makes an astonishing statement to him. "Truly, truly," and the reason He says "truly, truly"—and He says it three times in this conversation—is because this is all brand new information to Nicodemus, and for the first time in his religious education he's hearing the truth. He's hearing the truth. The whole system belonged to Satan, and it was all lies about salvation by works and religious ritual. Now he's hearing the truth and here's the truth, "Unless one is born again, he can't see the kingdom of God." I know you want the kingdom. I know you want to know God, to be reconciled to God, to be in the kingdom of God. To live a kingdom life, you have to be born again. Why does He say that to him? Because Jesus initiates His conversation with this religious legalist by saying, "You need what you can't contribute to."

Now we've been two weeks working on this; I won't take a lot of time. But Jesus chooses His analogy very carefully. I said a few weeks ago, there's a book called *How To Be Born Again.* That book is in complete defiance to this text because the whole point of being born again is that something has to happen to you to which you make no contribution. Simply stated, What contribution did you make to your physical birth? What? None. You didn't make a contribution and that's why the Lord chose this. And nor will you make a contribution to your spiritual birth. So the first thing Jesus says to Nicodemus

is—and this stops him dead in his legalistic tracks—something has to happen to you from above and you have no part in it. Try that on the next time you evangelize somebody. You need something you can't do. You need something you can't participate in. You need something you can't contribute to. You need heaven to come down. And oh, by the way, unless you're born from above, born again, unless you're born of the Spirit, you'll never enter the kingdom of God. And by the way, the Spirit comes and goes when He wills, and you can't call Him and you can't dismiss Him. And this is the doctrine of divine calling, the effectual call, the efficient call. This is what some call irresistible grace. This is the calling that identifies the church as the called. It's divine.

So He says to Nicodemus, "Sorry, Nicodemus, you need what you can't participate in." And so we went through verse 10 in that amazing doctorate of divine, sovereign grace. God has to give you life. And what did I say? What can the sinner do? Ask, that's all. And Nicodemus doesn't know what to do with this. And Jesus ends the first part of the conversation in verses 9 and 10 by saying, "How is it that you don't know this? You study the Old Testament. How is it you don't know this? Do you remember Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36? Do you remember all the times God said, 'I will take out your heart of stone. I will give you a new heart. I will give you My Spirit. I will cause you to walk in My statutes and My ways.'" Those two New Covenant passages are all about God's sovereign power regenerating the dead sinner. How is it you're the teacher of Israel and you don't know this? How is it?

Well, Nicodemus didn't buy it. How do you know that? Verse 11 and 12. End of verse 11, "You don't accept our testimony." Middle of verse 12, "You don't believe." Nicodemus didn't buy it. He didn't believe it. This is literally turning his world over because he's a legalist. Something has to happen to you that you don't participate in.

Wow! This is the great doctrine of divine, sovereign salvation. But running parallel to that doctrine is another doctrine. It's the doctrine of human responsibility. And we talked about that, right? And how those two run parallel but never intersect. And we believe them both. And the fact that we can't harmonize them only means we're human. And in case you have any questions about that, talk to the nearest person and they'll solve the problem of your dilemma. We are human. The fact that we can't understand everything is testament to our humanity. And alongside divine sovereignty comes human responsibility. And that's where we pick up the story.

We can go down to pick up the story in verses 11 to 21. At this point Nicodemus doesn't believe, he doesn't buy it, he doesn't accept this. So Jesus reminds him in verse 13 that no one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. That He has been a part of a system of religion like all systems of religion that are earthly or demonic, and now he's hearing from heaven. No one has been to heaven and brought a message back. Only the Son of Man has come from heaven. So you better listen to this message. This isn't just another human and demonic message. This is coming to you by way of the Son of Man. Nicodemus isn't speaking anymore but

he's there. The pronoun "you" stops being singular and broadens out, and now He's talking to Nicodemus, and He's talking through Nicodemus to all the Pharisees who are part of Nicodemus' group, and all the nation of Israel who are following the Pharisees, and the rest of the world that are caught up in religion and He is simply saying, "You had better listen to the One who came from heaven because only One has come from heaven with the truth, only One."

"I tried to tell you earthly things, I used an earthly illustration of regeneration and birth, and you couldn't even get an earthly thing. I know you're not going to believe now when I tell you heavenly things, but I'm going to reveal those heavenly things anyway." And He starts to talk about heavenly things, first of all, by saying, "I came down from heaven and I'm the one with the truth and the only one with the truth."

And I will say this to you, people, and it's obvious, but it's so seminal in this passage: the only truth from God about salvation came from Jesus Christ. All other sources are lies and deception, either earthly or demonic, or a combination. And I'm telling you, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. I came down, I will be lifted up. This is an allusion to His death. We went over all that last time.

Now He comes to verse 15 and we'll pick up the account for today. "So that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." Now you have to understand that Nicodemus is in a state of turmoil when he arrives. He's wondering what more legalistic thing, or what more religious thing, he can do to take the last, final step to get into the kingdom and get some peace in his troubled soul. And Jesus says absolutely nothing; you can't do anything. In fact, you've got to cancel out everything you've ever done. Like Paul, you've got it designated as *skubalon,* and you've got to go back and be born all over again, and that's something that can only happen from heaven. You need a divine miracle from heaven over which you have no control and in which you do not participate. That's shaken his entire perception of religion.

And now there's a second shock. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in the Son of Man whose come from heaven and is lifted up"—an allusion to His cross—"whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." Whoever believes.

What's the shock there? Well, believe could be a shock because this is salvation by faith. But the real shock is "whoever"; that's the shocker. Eternal life, they knew what that was. By the way, John uses the reference to eternal life fifteen times in his gospel. The Jews knew what eternal life was. It was the life of God, not so much a duration of time as a quality of life. The life of God, the very life of God, divine life, everlasting life, transcendent life, supernatural life, union with the Trinity, possessing the life of God now and forever, this is available to whoever believes. The shock is in the "whoever." Why? Because the Jews believed that when the Messiah came He would save Israel and punish all the nations. He would punish them for their blasphemy. He would punish them for their idolatry. He

would punish them for their mistreatment of Israel. And now Jesus says, “Whoever believes.” And He says nothing about Moses, nothing about Abraham, nothing about the Temple, nothing about the tabernacle, nothing about the Law. He simply says it’s about believing in the Son of Man who is lifted up and whoever believes will have eternal life.

Now you have to understand that this lifelong, legalistic Pharisee is having a very difficult time letting this even enter into his mind, let alone processing it. But Jesus is saying anybody who believes, anybody who believes in Him, the Son of Man lifted up, will escape judgment, escape hell, be given forgiveness, blessing, everlasting life in heaven. Salvation is by faith. That’s our message, that’s our message—it’s by believing. We call this little series *sola fide,* borrowing from the Reformers who use Latin to express faith alone, *sola fide; sola gratia*, grace alone, *sola Christus*, Christ alone; *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone. Those were the phrases that they used.

They also use some other Latin phrases to describe saving faith. Now remember, chapter 2, verse 23 to 25, says, “Many believed; Nicodemus believed.” But what did they believe? They believed Jesus was a teacher, came from God, and did miracles. But that’s not enough to save. Nicodemus rejects the message of faith for salvation. He believes something, but he doesn’t believe what he has to believe.

So the Reformers came up with some terms. They said saving faith has three components: *notitia, fiducia, and assensus;* that’s your Latin lesson for today. N*otitia* is knowledge, you have to know. Faith comes by hearing the message concerning Christ, Romans 10. So you have to know. Then you have to have *fiducia,* you have to believe. That means to trust in or to believe. But the third one which is so important was *assensus* or assent, meaning to commit to, to commit, to take up your cross, to follow, to be obedient, to invest your entire life in that thing which you know and believe.

Nicodemus then is given the shocking thing from the lips of our Lord, that salvation is by faith alone. A faith that commits itself to the Son of Man, and the Son of Man lifted up and crucified, makes that full commitment, and anybody, whoever he is, who makes that commitment will have eternal life—Jew or Gentile.

This is just devastating. Nicodemus was a racist, very much so, as the Jews were. Their hatred of the idolatrous blasphemous nations was settled long before he came long. And now the shock is “whoever.” And it’s while Nicodemus is trying to process that that Jesus gives us the most familiar verse in the Bible, John 3:16. And this is an explanation of verse 15, ’cause Nicodemus is going to be saying to himself, “Why in the world would God do this? Why would God give eternal life to anybody who just believed in Him? Why would God not reserve eternal life for the people who kept the rules, right? For the people who followed the Law, for the people who kept the Sabbath, for the people who were traditionalists, for the people who were zealous for holy things, did the ceremonies, offered the sacrifices?”

Wait a minute. Why does eternal life get to be given to whoever believes, and not just Jews that believe but whoever believes? How can this possibly be?

And the answer is this, here's why, verse 16, "For God so"...What?..."loved the world." What's behind this whole thing? What's behind it all? God's...What?...God's love, God's love. Now this is a heavenly thing; this is a heavenly thing. Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life, because God who so loves the world gave His only begotten Son to make that possible. I think our very familiarity with this verse sometimes locks its truths in and we don't understand. I mean, we all say that, we knew it from, you know, elementary school or Sunday school. Do you know Reformed theologians have just worked this verse to death through the centuries? Here would be a classic Reformed theological explanation of John 3:16.

First of all we have the remote efficient cause. Then we have the approximate efficient cause. Then we have the instrumental cause. And then we would add the material cause. Does that move your heart? Is that gripping you? That's the theological way to explain John 3:16. The remote efficient cause—God's love. The approximate efficient cause—God's grace. The instrumental cause—belief. And then they would add the material cause—the cross. And the result, eternal life.

But let's not get technical. So let me give you a simpler outline. How about the motive for salvation? The motive? God so loved; God so loved. This is way beyond their confined racism. This is way beyond their hatred of Gentiles and the nations around them and the Romans living among them. God loves the world; God loves the world. How long had they justified their hatred for the world and defended it on the basis that this is how God felt? Right? They were the people of God. They were the representatives of God. This is the teacher. He hated the world 'cause God hated the world.

Not true. The reason that God makes salvation available to anyone who believes and the reason that anybody can believe is because God actually loves the world. Shocking, absolutely shocking. That's the motive.

The object is the world and anybody in the world whoever, whoever. The world here is a term simply for humanity, humanity, that's all—just God loves humanity. Titus 3:4 uses a similar expression, mankind. God loves mankind. It doesn't mean that He's going to save everyone who ever lives. That's pretty clear because verse 18 talks about the ones that are going to be judged 'cause of their unbelief.

There's only one world, one realm of humanity, and God has determined to set His love on that world. He didn't do that with angels. The angels that sinned were cast into hell and have never known God's love since their rebellion. But God chose to love the world. So the motive for salvation is love, and the object of salvation is the world. God's love shows up across the world in common grace and gospel

invitation. That's the broadest sweep of God's love. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. The sun rises on the just and the unjust. People fall in love, have children, enjoy the beauties of life and the world, the satisfactions, the successes, the wonderful things that God has placed in man's care in this world are all evidences that God has a general love for humanity. He gives them gospel opportunity. The gospel reaches to them. He demonstrates Himself and who He is inside of them. He writes His Law in their hearts and He makes Himself accessible to human reason so that you can look at the world that is and determine there's a God behind it and know something of His power and eternal Godhead, Romans 1.

But there's a special love that He has for His own in the world and they're all over the world. In fact, when you get a scene in heaven in Revelation 4 and 5 and 6 and 7, all the way through there, you see all the saints gather around the throne, eventually you find out they're from every tongue and tribe and people and nation, not just Israel.

So this confined racism that was true of Nicodemus and others, not a reflection of the heart of God. Nicodemus is messed up in his theology very severely. He can't earn His salvation. It has to come from heaven and it's a sovereign work of God, not a work of man. And God loves a world that he hates, and God makes salvation accessible by faith when he always thought it would be by works. And so the action for salvation comes next.

The motive is love. The object is the world. The action is He gave His only begotten Son. That's a little misleading, "only begotten Son." It's *monogenes, monogenes*. *Genes* is a Greek word from which you get *genetics*. *Mono* is one. And what the word actually means, when you put *monogenes* together, it means unique, it means one of a kind, the only one. That's easier for you to understand. God gave His unique Son, His one of a kind Son, His beloved Son. "This is My beloved Son," He says, the Son of His love; His own Son Romans 8:3 puts it.

And there's something to be said here, very important. See the word "so"; "God so loved the world." What does "so" mean? "To the degree that," "to the end that," "in this way." That is God so loved the world. To what degree did He love the world? To the degree that He gave His only Son. In other words, the extent of His love is measured by the extent of His gift. The most magnanimous thing that God could possibly do would be to give the thing He loved the most, the One He loved the most, the Son of His love. He gives the person that He loves the most, the Son of His love, and that shows you the extent of His love. He loves the world so that He gives His one of a kind, unique, beloved Son.

The means for salvation? Whoever believes—believe, believe, believe; that's the means. Believe, believe what? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe that God raised Him from the dead. Believe in the significance of the cross and the resurrection. Believe the gospel. Whoever, whoever.

Listen carefully. The free offer of the gospel is broad enough to include *the* worst sinner who believes. Did you get that? The free offer of the gospel is broad enough to include the worst sinner who believes. Even the chief of sinners; Paul said he was. Listen, the gospel is narrow enough to exclude the most moral religious unbeliever. I thought about that this week. Who is the most moral, religious man on the planet? The pope. But he hopes in his works, in his merit to get to heaven, and the gospel excludes him. The most profligate, wretched, corrupt person on the planet who trusts only in Christ—the gospel is wide enough to embrace him or her. It's by faith alone.

And what is the result? "Shall not perish but have eternal life." Negative—"shall not perish." "Perish" is the Greek word *apollumi,* which is much used in the New Testament for eternal ruin; it refers to hell. Positive—eternal life, eternal life.

So maybe there's a fresh look at John 3:16. Now follow very carefully in these last few moments. So the message of our Lord is this, you need to be born from above and that's a work of God. And you don't participate in it. But anybody can be saved who believes and no other way. Anyone who believes. Why would God do that? Because then He gets all the glory, as Paul said in Ephesians; we don't boast, but because He loves the world.

You know, it would be easy to think of holy God as viewing humanity in the condition it's in—in sin, rebellion, disobedience, hating God. It would be easy, you know, if Scripture said, "God looked at the world and He said, 'I'll break them, I'll punish them. I'll put the pressure on them of divine judgment until they come to me.'" But it wasn't His anger that sent Christ. Christ didn't come to judge the world. He came into the world to save the world because what motivated the Father was not His anger, but His...What?...His love and so you come then to verse 17, "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him," "through Him." God wanted to save the world. God sent Jesus to save the world. Jesus came to save the world. That is sinners from all over the world. He sent His Son because of His infinite love of sinners. He sent His Son to display His grace and mercy, to save them from His wrath. His love motivated Him to save them from His wrath. That's another heavenly thing.

The purpose of the Messiah's coming is not condemnation; it's not judgment. The Jews expected the Messiah will come and judge all these nations. Messiah comes and they rejected Him. He wound up judging them, but opened the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Next time He comes, He will come in judgment. The Second Coming He will come in judgment. But this time the Son of Man is come, Luke 19:10, "to seek and to save that which was lost." He didn't come to judge the world; He came to save, to save. However, very important, verse 18, "He who doesn't believe has been judged already because He has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. I can't tell you how important this is. And I said, this is a very seminal chapter, we could be here forever in this chapter, nuancing all these truths but let me help you with this. Listen

carefully. “He who does not believe has been judged already.” The word “already” is the key. I want you to follow this; the word “already” is the key. Christ came in love to save because God in love sent Him to save, which means you don’t need to run to Mary to find somebody sympathetic. God is by nature a Savior. Christ is by nature a Savior. Believe and you will be saved. Believe, that’s all it takes;and all the charges against you are wiped away. The Bible says you come into a status that can be defined this way, “No condemnation, full pardon, rescued from the curse of the Law, cleared from all guilt, declared righteous, granted eternal life, never to be removed.” What grace, what mercy, what immense love.

But on the other hand, if you don’t believe, you have been judged already because you have not believed in the Son of God, the unique Son of God. Now let me tell you what the “already” means. Typical of people in the world to say, “I’m living my life, I think I do more good than bad, right? I think you know if God’s keeping records, I’m going to be okay. I’m going to be....” I’ve had people say that to me, important people in media places say, “I’m going to be okay; I’m going to be okay. You know, my good outweighs my bad.”

Can I tell you something? That’s irrelevant. That is irrelevant for this reason. You’ve been judged already. Do you know when the verdict was made on your life? Do you know when the gavel fell? When you arrived in the planet. You arrived in the planet as an unbeliever, not believing in Christ. The gavel fell and the verdict was rendered and sentence was passed. Nothing is now being determined, nothing. There is no one counting your record to see if your good outweighs your bad. You have been judged already. You were judged when you were born. You were judged because you were an unbeliever. Oh yeah, God knows everything, so He’s well aware of the record of your crimes against Him. But that has nothing to do with the verdict because the verdict has already been passed. The divine Judge has already ruled, the gavel has come down and you have been condemned and sentenced to hell.

Now again, most people think they’re in the process of accumulating a record, and if the good outweighs the bad, then the Judge will make the ruling in his favor in the end. And I want to tell all of you who think that, the judgment was passed when you arrived. The sword of Damocles is over your head. The sack is on your head. Your neck is in the guillotine, and the guy’s about to let go of the rope. Final judgment was passed long ago. No future verdict will be made.

What caused this? “Because you have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” You’re going to be sent to hell not for something you did but for what you didn’t do, and that’s believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that makes that pretty important, critically important. Every sinner is already condemned. The only way that verdict can be reversed and the slate cleaned and the sinner forgiven is by believing in the unique Son of God, the only way. So it’s important to remember this: what damns people to hell in the

end is not because of some divine decree made by God. It doesn't make that. What damns people to hell is not because of some deficient provision in the sacrifice of Christ. What damns people to hell is not because they sin and because they break God's Law. What damns people to hell is because they do not believe in Jesus Christ. That's the issue.

So when you talk to people, I think it's sometimes okay to say, "You know, you're a lawbreaker, you've broken this law, broken that law, broken the Ten Commandments, fine. That's all forgivable." Sooner or later in the conversation, and may I suggest sooner rather than later, you need to address people about what they think concerning Jesus Christ and cut to the chase and say, "If you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer, and Savior, and Lord, you will die in your sins and go to hell. That is the one unforgivable sin."

Now when sinners come before God at the Great White Throne judgment depicted in the book of Revelation, and then brought before the tribunal of God—they face God—you might assume they're going to complain. They're going to say, "Look, I mean, what do I have to do with anything, God; it's Your fault, Your fault." And they'll complain against You, like Adam did; the woman You gave me, it's Your fault.

Or somebody might complain of Adam, "What did I have to do? I wasn't in the Garden, if I had been in the Garden instead of Adam, I wouldn't have done that. Look at me, I'm the victim of what Adam did." Or somebody might want to say, "Well, it's my nature; what am I going to do? Has the Adamic nature got passed down to me? I came from corrupt parents, what do you expect?" Or somebody might say, "It was my circumstances. I mean, look at the circumstances I had to live in."

Do you know none of that matters? What you're going to say when you stand before God is this, "I refuse to believe in Jesus Christ," and that's the issue. And that will be the issue. You have been judged already—you're condemned and sentenced. And if you continue in unbelief, you will perish.

Now with the seriousness of that and the opportunity to come to Christ, you'd say, "Wow, why do sinners reject? Why do they not believe?" Listen to this, verse 19, "This is the judgment that the light has come into the world," that's Christ, the light, identified in chapter 1; He is the light. "The light has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and doesn't come to the light for fear that His deeds will be exposed."

There's one reason people don't believe in Christ, one reason. They love their sin. They don't want to come near Christ 'cause He shines a light on their sin, exposes their sin. Sinners love sin. It's not ignorance. It's not lacking the basic faculties of reason. It's not misunderstanding. Sinners prefer moral darkness. They're like bugs that run for the dark when you pick the rock up. They love their corruption. They delight in their evil and love darkness, hate light, don't want to come to the light

because if they come to the light they'll be exposed for what they are. So they resent the truth, they resent the Scripture, they resent the church, they resent Christians, they run from us. It's strong—it's a strong, dominating compulsion in a fallen heart. If you look at John 7:7 it says, "The world cannot hate you," Jesus talking, "but it hates Me because I testify of it that its deeds are evil." They hate Christ because He exposes their sin. That eventually gets passed down to us.

Now may I say something practical, and I'll finish up in the next couple of minutes? Stop appealing to sinners psychologically. Stop saying, "Do you want purpose in your life? Jesus will give you purpose." Stop that. Stop saying Jesus will make you happy, give you a better life, solve your problems, make you better, make you richer—stop. That produces false converts because that sheds no light on the sinner's wretchedness. That uncovers nothing. That exposes nothing. That's a lie. What you want to do is shine the light of the pure righteousness of Jesus Christ as brightly as you can on the sinner and see if the sinner runs. That has no value to people, that kind of stuff—produces nothing but false converts. The issue is to confront sin in all its horror and all its ugliness and they will seal their sentence by rejecting Christ because they love their iniquity. Or by the grace of God they will run to the truth, verse 21, "He who practices the truth comes to the light so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

You know what the difference between the sinner and the believer is? Why are you here today? You come to Grace Church. I know why people come to Grace Church. I know why you come, because we turn the light on so bright. Right? We're not messing around. We turn the light on bright. This is the light. This is the light that reveals the light and it's bright here, and if you've got something to hide, you better go down the street to the next church. But the people who practice the truth are here because the light shines and reveals that what's going on in their life is being done by God. So what do they get out of that? Assurance, comfort, encouragement, security. I don't know about you, but I can't get enough light shed on my life. That's why you're here. People say to me sometimes, "I don't go to that church anymore." I don't ask why; I know why. I need a little more shade.

But the benefit is, if you're one of those who practices the truth, the light comes on and you take a look at your life in the light and you say, "What's going on in me is wrought by God." And there's confidence and assurance and joy in that. We come to the light, we love the light, we welcome the communion with Christ. And there's no fear; there's complete acceptance and security and joy and protection and love. Boy, what a...what a...what a message Nicodemus got that day and he never even asked a question. He just got his heart read.

Oh by the way, he eventually became a believer. The seventh chapter, he speaks a word in defense of Jesus and he's in process; chapter 19, he shows up with Joseph to bury His Savior. It took a while but you'll meet him in heaven.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, we thank You for its power, its clarity, its encouragement, profoundly blesses us. Thank You for this precious congregation of people. We thank You that You have by Your grace and power made us a people who have been given life, and we now have the joy of practicing the truth and we come to the light and we embrace the light and we love the light, we can't get enough of the light. Because even though it does expose the remnants of our fallenness, it also shows us that You're at work in us. We measure ourselves by the Word of God and we say, yes, this is the work You're doing in me. What a joy, what a blessing. I pray for those who hear this message who have not yet believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. May they understand that nothing is in question then at this moment; nothing is yet to be determined in the future; they have been judged already. And may they run to Christ, to the One lifted up on a cross to bear their sins and rose for their justification, and may they believe in Him as Lord and Savior. Deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. May heaven come down and give life. May sinners believe to Your glory.

Father we are so rich because we have the truth. When our Lord says "truly, truly," we say "Amen," we affirm. But You've already brought to us, and what You've already taught us we are taught of You, taught by the Spirit. Thank You for Your living and abiding Word. Seal it to our hearts and use us to pass on this glorious message of Christ. May we warn sinners, in love. May we remind them that God does love them and whoever of them is willing to believe in His Son will be completely forgiven, the sentence will be reversed. No condemnation will ever fall, and instead they will be given Your very righteousness as a covering and eternal life in Your presence—what a gift. And may You diminish the attraction of sin that holds sinners prisoner; do it by Your power. We are reminded of the hymn we sung earlier. "Long my imprisoned spirit lay/ Fast bound in sin and nature's night;/ Thine eye defused to quickening ray,/ I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;/ My chains fell off, my heart was free,/ I rose, went forth to follow Thee." That would be our desire for every heart. Bring us back again tonight with great expectation. In Christ's name, amen.

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