

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: God's Grace and Man's Acceptance or Rejection of It, John 3:16-21

Date preached: October 4, 2015

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INTRODUCTION: I've finished the series in Hebrews, and today, I decided to preach from John 3:17-21. Every time I preach, I think about those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. We've got a quite a wide range of a television audience, and I want to give a clear salvation message this morning.

There are four points to my message today, and they are:

1. Salvation is initiated by God's grace.
2. God provides salvation because he wants to.
3. People condemn themselves.
4. People love darkness more than light.

First, SALVATION IS INITIATED BY GOD'S GRACE.

SCRIPTURE: John 3:16 ¹⁶*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*

The secular world around us is quick to point out that God is angry, completely impotent, and ineffective in today's world. But, nothing could be further from the truth.

Recently, I talked briefly about free will, and I am going to do it a bit more right now. The only people who ever lived with 100% free will were Adam and Eve. They were put in the Garden of Eden long ago. They had absolutely no knowledge of sin at all. They had no need to repent because they were already saved. Their souls were the Lord's. They had no need to feel bad for anything they had done because there was no evil at all. They couldn't even imagine sin if they tried. They had no concept of jealousy, hate, greed, or any other sin. They were completely innocent and had regular, ongoing communication with God.

What if there is something out there that you know nothing about? Well, you wouldn't know it because you know nothing about it. And, this is where Adam and Eve were.

God told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but he gave them a choice, and they chose to do it. Their eyes were opened to a whole new world of sin. They hid from God, and God could have wiped them out, but because he LOVED them, he forgave their sin. But, they could not go back to the way life had been before they sinned because now they had the knowledge of something they did not have before. Their innocence was completely gone.

Their salvation was initiated by God. It was not initiated by them. Go back and read the story. Through the curse, they paid a dear price, but they did not pay the ultimate price. The ultimate price would have been their condemnation. So, we see, God reached down to them out of love. This takes me to verse 17.

Second, GOD PROVIDES SALVATION BECAUSE HE WANTS TO.

SCRIPTURE: John 3:17 ¹⁷*For God did not sent his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Again, our secular society tends to see God—if they believe in him at all—as one who condemns the world over and over. They'll be quick to say, if there is a God, why is there so much suffering in the world? Why are there starving people? Why do we have wars? They see the lack of God's intervention as either proof there is no God, or, if there is one, he is one who condemns the world by his indifference.

Nothing could be further from the truth. This world is rotting because of the spread of sin. Sin, from the beginning, has spread and consumed nearly everything in this world. In fact, if you were to read in the Bible about what God says about sin, then you'd have to wonder why the world is even still in existence. Listen to me—the only reason there is any world at all is because of God's grace.

All goodness in this world is because of God's grace. The person who does a good deed, whether he believes in God or not, is doing that good deed because of God's grace. All kindness, acts of charity, warm feelings, thoughts, and words are only because of God's grace. I don't believe for one minute people have any goodness

on their own merit. Inventions which make the world a better place are by God's grace. Happiness, joy, and a sense of well-being are only because of God's grace. Medicine and the ability to provide medical care—it's all by God's grace.

Adam and Eve may have brought the knowledge of good and evil into the world, but they did not destroy God's grace. It's all around us.

And, so God's grace is given through the person of Jesus Christ. God did not send him into the world to condemn the world. Think about it—he could have done just that, and he would have been justified in doing it. Jesus could have gone around condemning everyone and everything. Instead of healing people, he could have destroyed them. Instead of working miracles, which were always good ones, he could have worked miracles to destroy people. But, that's not why Jesus came.

So, why did Jesus come to this earth? He came “to save the world.” Now, that's a tall order isn't it? How can anyone save this rotten world? There's only one person who can do it.

Third, PEOPLE CONDEMN THEMSELVES.

SCRIPTURE: John 3:18 ¹⁸*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son.*

To be able to believe and have faith is because of God's grace. Just the “possibility” to believe Jesus is the son of God is a gift from God. Just as God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, neither does he condemn those who believe. But the person who does not believe is condemned already.

I studied this word—*already*. Jesus came to pull people out of their condemned state, so when the scripture says they are *already* condemned by their lack of belief; they are not condemned because God condemned them. They are condemned because they do not believe.

ILLUSTRATION: Let's say a plane is over water when one of the engines fails. At the beginning of the flight, the flight attendant told everyone how to use the life preserver. Some listened; most didn't. Now that the plane is going down over water,

they are all condemned to die, except those who use the flotation devices. They are condemned because of physical location.

People are condemned not by physical location but by spiritual condition. We are all condemned by our own choice to sin. Those who believe are not condemned. So if anyone is not a believer, they have condemned themselves. God has not condemned them. **I want you to understand this.**

Why is a person condemned? Because: he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son.

Third, PEOPLE LOVE DARKNESS MORE THAN LIGHT.

SCRIPTURE: John 3:19-21 ¹⁹*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* ²⁰*Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.* ²¹*but whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.*

Do you know why there is so much sin the world? Do you know why there is so much evil in the world? Here's the answer: because people love it.

This is the verdict. Court has been in session, and now we've reached a verdict: people love their sin.

There is so much war in the world because people would rather fight than have peace. There is so much hunger in the world because oppressive governments would rather use people as pawns to accomplish their political objectives. There is so much crime in the world because people would rather commit crimes than be honest.

Now the list could go on, but I'm sure you get the message, and I'm sure you agree—people love their sin.

If court was held, and any of us were declared a sinner, would there be enough evidence to convict any of us? Yes, indeed! The court could show exhibit A all the

way to Z and twice over again. We'd be found completely guilty? And why is that? Because, we are all sinners. Even believers struggle with sin.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:21-25, [the Apostle Paul says] ²¹ *So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.* ²² *For in my inner being I delight in God's law;* ²³ *but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.* ²⁴ *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?* ²⁵ *Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

EXPLANATION: If the Apostle Paul struggled with sin, then certainly I also struggle with it. But, there is hope. The light of Christ exposes sin. For the believer, it should lead to confession. For the non-believer, it should also lead to the confession that Jesus Christ is the only one who can forgive sin.

CONCLUSION:

- Salvation is initiated by God's grace.
- God provides salvation because he wants to.
- People condemn themselves.
- People love darkness more than light.

There is someone here today who needs Jesus as Lord and Savior. Whoever believes in Jesus will have forgiveness of sin, which comes with eternal life.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA