

# ***“Your Greatest Gift”***

**John 3:16**

Christmas Eve 2017

**VIDEO:**      *“Emmanuel”*

**T/S:**      *“God with us” (Emmanuel) is the greatest GIFT of all history and humanity!*

It’s our story of Christmas, Christ/Christianity & Church!

**INTRO:**      **Welcome...** today is both a start & end...  
➤ Most **celebrated** Christian **holiday**...  
➤ Most **celebrated** Christian **Bible-verse**...  
➤ Most **celebrated** Christian **commissioning**...

**But...** today is **NOT** about *“tempered-traditions”*      **No.**  
Today we **CELEBRATE** the glory of *triumphant-Truth!*

**T/S:**      Today’s message is:      ***“Your Greatest Gift”***

## **PREVIEW:**

- I.    A **Unique** *Story of Truth & Love*
- II.   A **Unique** *Gift-Giver AND Gift-given*
- III. A **Unique** *Discipleship Dynamic*
- IV.  A **Unique** *Timeless Take-away*
- V.    A **Unique** *Quality & Quantity of Life*

## CONTEXT:

- Gospel of John
- Jesus with Nicodemus (the religious expert)
- A “how” question with a “Who” answer...
- Full context clarity (v.1-21) is priceless!

## TEXT:

### John 3:16

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

## I. A Unique Story of Truth & Love

*“For God so loved the world...”*

*“For”* = connects v.16 back to v.15

*“God”* = Creator of ALL that is & is-in creation

*“so”* = “in this way” – “to such an extent”

*“loved”* = “active agape” (initiating, taking action!)

*“world”* = “humanity” - ALL people, EVERY-where!

Jesus is making a Messianic proclamation of:

- **PROMISE** (verse & victory)
- **POWER** (giver of life)
- **PURPOSE** (save souls)
- **PEOPLE** (“world”)
- **PERSEVERANCE!** (focus on the finish!)

**VIDEO:**

*“Carry On”*

<https://youtu.be/TWPLtLaBC1Y>

- *We’re burning the bridges of our past.  
We’re pressing on to the Hope that lasts!  
For the good of our LORD...  
& the thrill of His glory, the thrill of His glory!*
- *“He’s coming soon!”*

*“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love, because He first loved us” ([1 John 4:10](#), [19](#)).*

**cf. Luke 19:10 & Romans 5:8**

## **II. A Unique Gift-giver & Gift-given**

*For God so loved the world  
that He gave His only-begotten Son...*

**“gave/gift”**

**Romans 3:24** = believers are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

**Ephesians 2:8-9** = "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"

**God's love leads to loving actions!** - JDP

\*\*\* Unique & "indescribable Gift"

"His indescribable gift" of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 9:15)

\*\*\* "only-begotten" = "mono" – "genes" **One of a kind.**

- Creator & Sustainer of ALL created things...
- Lover & Lifter of all people & potential...
- Revealer & Redeemer to all...repent & believe
- Transformer & Discipler of all Christ followers
- Savior & Sanctifier of ALL biblical believers.

**VIDEO:** "*Will Never Be The Same*" <https://youtu.be/kTmHR7QZk-o>

- "I am not who I once was... my whole life has been changed... Met the Forgiver... and now this sinner, will never be the same!

T/S: Wesley's hymn "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see...Hail-th' incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell... Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

### III. A Unique Discipleship Dynamic

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only  
begotten Son **that whosoever believes in  
Him...***

*“whosoever”*

- Anyone & EVERY-one is to receive this invitation
- *“If you can find & describe a people, ANY person or people, the gospel message is meant for them.”* - JDP
- Remember **Acts 4:13**'s “magnificently common”
- We **invite** ALL and **invest** in the FEW...

**NOTE:** universal *invitation* vs. universal salvation!

*“believes”*

*To “believe” is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means to put our trust and confidence in Him that He alone can save us.... It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans AND eternal destiny. Believing is BOTH trusting His words as reliable, AND relying on him for the power to change.*

- **Life Application Study Bible.**

- 5 “Sola”

- By GRACE alone
- Thru FAITH alone
- In CHRIST alone
- To the GLORY of God alone
- According to the SCRIPTURES alone

➤ *“Believing”* is a 3-legged stool: **mMm**

**VIDEO:** *“Bring An Awakening”* <https://youtu.be/d4W8tt7B0BI>

- Come & consume us with your power, Jesus we need you in this hour... we NEED an awakening!
- For your glory... make us holy!

*The message of the Good News comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone – really LOVE someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us with His blood..... When we share the Good News with others, our love must be Christ-like love—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.*

## **IV. A Unique & Timeless Take-away**

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him*  
***will not perish...***

*The guarantee given to those who possess eternal life is that they will never perish. Genuine salvation can never be lost; true believers will be divinely preserved and will faithfully persevere*  
***because they are kept by God's power & promise!***

**VIDEO:**      *“What Mercy Did For Me”*  
<https://youtu.be/-GRU5K3UFmE>

- *I needed Someone to come rescue me... and Mercy heard my plea!*
- *Lord, You found me, you healed me, You called me from the grave...*
- *Now I'm livin, like I'm forgiven... You came and set me free... that's what Your mercy did for me!*

## **V. Unique Quality/Quantity of Life**

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish **but will have eternal life.***

*In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. But... when we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have.... When in reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity.*

**VIDEO:**        *“When I Go To Live With God”*

<https://youtu.be/ZBYk0ZPLBkM>

**T/S:**    **A Unique Praise & Appreciation**

**CLOSE:**     Remember where we started... *“Emmanuel”*

*Today we CELEBRATE Jesus!*

*He was, and is, and will ALWAYS be – Emmanuel.*

*He was, and is, and will always be – **God WITH us!**”*

**T/S:**    I leave with a closing song that says it all...

**Let's PRAY** & let this song be our collective AMEN!!

**NOTE** the last words:    *“You get ALL the glory Jesus.”*

**VIDEO:**        *“AMEN”*    <https://youtu.be/QHQKuWQhu8o>

# *“Your Greatest Gift”*

John 3:16

Christmas Eve 2017

## **John 3:16 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup> "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.

### **Setting Up the Section**

This passage of scripture includes some of the most popular verses in the Christian world. [John 3](#) is the most quoted chapter from the New Testament, and holds within it one of the first verses ever memorized by many American Sunday school children, [John 3:16](#).

This text is popular not only because it sets forth for us the great love of God for humanity, but also because it lays out, in very direct terms, the gospel message. Therefore, it is a treasured chapter in the scriptures for its concise teaching of the nature of humanity, the need for regeneration, and the nature of the Messiah and His great love and work for humanity. We find here a very clear presentation of the gospel and the essentials of salvation and faith.

We are told two things about Nicodemus ([3:1](#)):

## **3:1-21**

### **Nicodemus**

1. He is a Pharisee, a Jewish sect devoted to keeping the Law of Moses.
2. He is a ruler of the Jews, a member of the seventy-member Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin.

Nicodemus' first statement ([3:2](#)) reveals who he and others think that Jesus is:

- He is from God.
- He is a teacher.
- God is with Jesus on the basis of the signs that He has performed.

His statement also implies a question: Is there more that I should know about who you are? Jesus begins **His reply in [verse 3](#) with the famous, “Verily, verily” (KJV), or the more modern,**

**“I tell you the truth” (NIV). He does this as well in [verses 5 and 11](#). In Greek, the word used here is *amen* (thus... *Amen & Amen* , which means “this is the binding truth.”**

Basically, Jesus says Nicodemus will be unable to understand who He is and the true nature of His life unless he is radically transformed—born again ([3:3](#)).

When Nicodemus fails to understand, he responds to the idea of rebirth literally ([3:4](#)).

## **Nicodemus has a physical understanding of the kingdom of God rather than a spiritual one.**

Notice in [verse 3](#), Jesus says that one cannot see (perceive) the kingdom of God unless he is born again, and in [verse 5](#), Jesus says that one cannot enter (experience) the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and Spirit.

**What does this mean to be born of water and Spirit?**

**In order to understand we must look from Nicodemus's point of view.** While John the Baptist had baptized in water to prepare for redemption, Christian baptism (as a symbol of redemption through Christ) is not a custom yet. Jesus chastises Nicodemus for not understanding (3:10), so Jesus' reference is to something Nicodemus would have heard. In this case it is an Old Testament passage that Nicodemus would be very familiar with—[Ezekiel 36](#), specifically [verses 25-27](#).

In this passage, **Ezekiel describes what needs to happen in order for Israel to partake of the kingdom of God—to be washed clean in the water of God and to have God's Spirit placed within. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he needs to have the birth of water and Spirit—the same birth mentioned in [Ezekiel 36](#).**

Nicodemus needs to understand that Jesus is not talking about a physical rebirth, but a spiritual one ([3:6](#)).

## Demystifying John

Jesus' illustration of the wind in [verse 8](#) means, in essence, you must have faith, then understanding will come. Even if you do not know what causes the wind, it does not stop you from believing in it. (Remember this is before our contemporary understanding of meteorology, so there was not the understanding of wind and weather that we have today.)

Jesus' point to Nicodemus in [verse 10](#) is that the truth has been in the scriptures all along. Yet Nicodemus may have spent his life teaching that adherence to the Law of God was the condition to enter the kingdom of God. That was certainly the impression given by the Pharisees of his day.

Nicodemus's failure is a lack of wisdom, not of explanation. It is a failure to believe ([3:11-12](#)). Jesus is the one who came from heaven as the revelation of God ([3:13](#)). **Jesus is God explained. What Nicodemus needs to do if he is going to understand these things is come to grips with Jesus Christ.**

The event Jesus refers to in the life of Moses is recorded in [Numbers 21:4-9](#) ([3:14-15](#)).

A bronze snake on a pole was the means God used to give life to the children of Israel when they were bitten in a plague of snakes. If they looked to the serpent Moses held high, they survived the plague. In the same way, Jesus must be lifted up—on the cross. There He will die and take on humanity's punishment for its sins.

Nicodemus is being challenged to turn to Jesus for new birth, just as the ancient Israelites were commanded to turn to the bronze snake for new life.

*The word believe as used here by Jesus ([3:15](#)) means to place trust and faith in something. In this context, it means that your entire relationship with God is resting on this one thing, Jesus Christ.*

Verses 16-21 are Jesus' instructions to Nicodemus, explaining in detail the nature of the Messiah so that Nicodemus could understand who the object of his faith should be.

*In the famous [John 3:16](#), Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus the true nature of God toward the world, the fact that God is love, and that His love extends past Israel to all the people in the world.*

**Critical Observation**

*To someone who believed that the world was pagan and deserving of God's judgment, Jesus' proposal that God loves the whole world would have been a surprising thought. Jesus is saying that God did not choose the Jews so that by nature of Judaism they would be saved. God chose the Jews so that through that race the Messiah would come and save people all over the world, Jews included. This was a revolutionary thought for a first-century Jewish Pharisee to take in.*

**The traditional translation “begotten” used in some versions of [John 3:16](#), is probably better translated as “one of a kind” or “unique.”**

Jesus is the one who is from God, and therefore shares the nature of God. His glory is not just a part of God; He shares in the full nature of God.

**There are two types of believing.** One type is to mentally understand something. The other type is a belief in something so much that you place all of your hope and trust in that which you believe. Here Jesus means the latter, that all who place their faith in the work of Jesus on the cross will have eternal life.

Jesus next deals with judgment. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus believes that God will pour out His wrath on the world and restore Israel to her position of glory. Jesus' mission is one of salvation, not judgment ([3:17](#)). At first this seems a contradiction to verses like [John 9:39](#), in which Jesus pronounces His judgment. But these are different kinds of judgment. The type of judgment that Jesus talks about in [9:39](#) is the final judgment in which the wicked will be cast away forever, and the righteous will be established in the kingdom of God. Jesus did not come the first time for that judgment. That will be part of His second coming. And that is the kind of judgment He mentions in [verse 18](#).

**- Layman's Bible Commentary**

(For) God = "Theos"

so = "in this manner" or "to this degree"

loved = agape in verb form

the world = “cosmos” – best defined as “humanity” vs.  
“universes”

that He gave = God IS love! Here’s His expression of love

- God’s love is selfless
- God’s love is serving
- God’s love is sacrificial
- God’s love is strategic
- God’s love is saving
- See 1 Cor. 13 for extended description of “love”

His “only begotten” = a single compound word...

- “Mono” – single
- “Genes” – from which we get “genetics”
- “Unique” or “One of a kind” is best translation!

Son = text uses a common term but capitalizes it...

that whoever = Greek “pas” meaning “EVERYTHING” or  
“ALL-inclusive”

- believes =     Unpack for deeper biblical applications
- Strong's #4100 (to believe)
  - Strong's #4102 is the root of the word (faith-in)
    - NOTE: Strong's #3982 is the root of 4102

Greek Strong's Number: 3982

**Greek Word:** [πίθω](#)

**Transliteration:** peithō

**Phonetic Pronunciation:** [pi'-tho](#)

**Root:** a primary verb

**Cross Reference:** TDNT - 6:1,818

**Part of Speech:** v

**Vine's Words:** [Agree](#), [Agreement](#), [Belief](#), [Believe](#), [Believers](#), [Confidence](#), [Confident](#), [Friend](#), [Obedience](#), [Obedient](#), [Obey](#), [Persuade](#), [Trust](#), [Yield](#)

## Usage Notes:

English Words used in KJV:

persuade 22

trust 8

obey 7

have confidence 6

believe 3

be confident 2  
*miscellaneous translations 7*  
[Total Count: 55]

a primary verb; to **convince** (by argument, true or false); by analogy to *pacify* or *conciliate* (by other fair means); reflexive or passive to *assent* (to evidence or authority), to *rely* (by inward certainty) :- agree, **assure**, believe, have confidence, be (wax) **confident**, make friend, **obey**, **persuade**, **trust**, yield.

Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary.

Greek Strong's Number: 4102

**Greek Word:** πίστις

**Transliteration:** pistis

**Phonetic Pronunciation:** [pis'-tis](#)

**Root:** from [<G3982>](#)

**Cross Reference:** TDNT - 6:174,849

**Part of Speech:** n f

**Vine's Words:** Assurance, Assure, Assuredly, Belief, Believe, Believers, Faith, Fidelity

**Usage Notes:**

English Words used in KJV:

**faith** 239

**assurance** 1

believe + [<G1537>](#) 1

belief 1

them that believe 1

fidelity 1

[Total Count: 244]

from [<G3982>](#) (peitho); **persuasion**, i.e. *credence*; moral *conviction* (of *religious* truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially *reliance* upon Christ for salvation; abstract *constancy* in such profession; by extensive the system of religious (Gospel) **truth itself** :- assurance, **belief, believe**, faith, fidelity.

Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary.

- Vines Word Study: on 4100

**Belief**

**Usage Number:** A-1

**Part Of Speech:** Verb

**Strong's Number:** [<G4100>](#)

**Original Word:** [πιστεύω](#), *pisteuō*

**Usage Notes:** "to believe," also "**to be persuaded of**," and hence, "**to place confidence in, to trust**," signifies, in this sense of the word, **reliance upon, not mere credence**. It is most frequent in the writings of the Apostle John, especially the Gospel. He does not use the noun (see below). For the Lord's first use of the verb, see [John 1:50](#). Of the writers of the Gospels, **Matthew uses the verb ten times, Mark ten, Luke nine, John ninety-nine.**

***In [Acts 5:14](#) the present participle of the verb is translated "believers."***

See [COMMIT](#), [INTRUST](#), [TRUST](#).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

- Vines Word Study: on 4102

**Assurance**

**Usage Number:** A-1

**Part Of Speech:** Noun

**Strong's Number:** [<G4102>](#)

**Original Word:** [πίστις](#), *pistis*

**Usage Notes:** "faith," has the secondary meaning of "an assurance or guarantee," e.g., [Acts 17:31](#); **by raising Christ from the dead, God has given "assurance" that the world will be judged by Him** (the AV margin, "offered faith" does not express the meaning). Cp. [1 Tim. 5:12](#), where "faith" means "pledge." See [BELIEF](#), [FAITH](#), [FIDELITY](#).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

- Vines Word Study: on 3982

## **Persuade**

**Usage Notes:** \* in the Active Voice, signifies "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade," bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations, e.g., in [Matt. 27:20](#); [Matt. 28:14](#); [Acts 13:43](#); [Acts 19:8](#); in the Passive Voice, "to be persuaded, believe" (see [BELIEVE](#), No. 2, and [OBEY](#)), e.g., [Luke 16:31](#); [Luke 20:6](#); [Acts 17:4](#); RV (AV, "believed"); [Acts 21:14](#); [Acts 26:26](#); [Rom. 8:38](#); [Rom. 14:14](#); [Rom. 15:14](#); [2 Tim. 1:5](#), [12](#); [Heb. 6:9](#); [Heb. 11:13](#), in some mss.; [Heb. 13:18](#), RV (AV, "trust"). See [ASSURANCE](#), B, No. 3.

Note: For [Acts 26:28](#), AV, "thou persuadest," see [FAIN](#), Note.

**Usage Number: 1**

**Strong's Number: <[G3982](#)>**

**Original Word: [πείθω](#), *peithō***

**Usage Notes:** in the Active Voice, signifies "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade," bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations, e.g., in [Matt. 27:20](#); [Matt. 28:14](#); [Acts 13:43](#); [Acts 19:8](#); in the Passive Voice, "to be persuaded, believe" (see [BELIEVE](#), No. 2, and [OBEY](#)), e.g., [Luke 16:31](#); [Luke 20:6](#); [Acts 17:4](#); RV (AV, "believed"); [Acts 21:14](#); [Acts 26:26](#); [Rom. 8:38](#); [Rom. 14:14](#); [Rom. 15:14](#); [2 Tim. 1:5, 12](#); [Heb. 6:9](#); [Heb. 11:13](#), in some mss.; [Heb. 13:18](#), RV (AV, "trust"). See [ASSURANCE](#), B, No. 3.

Note: For [Acts 26:28](#), AV, "thou persuadest," see [FAIN](#), Note.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

in Him shall not perish = all pulled from one contextualized Greek word....

but have = “to have” is the thrust... (“but” is added per context only)

eternal = this is the “qualifier” of “life” that is to follow...

- Eternal speaks to “quantity” first...
- Eternal speaks to “quality” indirectly
- “life” is where the “quality” is best unpacked

life. = “zo – AY” in Greek...

- See Strongs #2222
  - NOTE: from Root Word #2198

Greek Strong's Number: 2198

**Greek Word:** ζᾶω

**Transliteration:** zaō

**Phonetic Pronunciation:** [dzah'-o](#)

**Root:** a primary verb

**Cross Reference:** TDNT - 2:832,290

**Part of Speech:** v

**Vine's Words:** [Live](#)

## Usage Notes:

English Words used in KJV:

live 117

be alive 9

alive 6

quick 4

lively 3

not tr 1

*miscellaneous translations* 2

vr live 1

[Total Count: 143]

a primary verb; to *live* (literal or figurative) :- life (-time), (a-) live (-ly), quick.

Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary.

See Vines on #2198

## Live

**Usage Number: 1**

**Strong's Number: <[G2198](#)>**

**Original Word: ζάω, *zaō***

**Usage Notes:** "to live, be alive," is used in the NT of "(a) God, [Matt. 16:16](#); [John 6:57](#); [Rom. 14:11](#); (b) the Son in Incarnation, [John 6:57](#); (c) the Son in Resurrection, [John 14:19](#); [Acts 1:3](#); [Rom. 6:10](#); [2 Cor. 13:4](#); [Heb. 7:8](#); (d) spiritual life, [John 6:57](#); [Rom. 1:17](#); [Rom. 8:13](#); [Gal. 2:19, 20](#); [Heb. 12:9](#); (e) the present state of departed saints, [Luke 20:38](#); [1 Pet. 4:6](#); (f) the hope of resurrection, [1 Pet. 1:3](#); (g) the resurrection of believers, [1 Thess. 5:10](#); [John 5:25](#); [Rev. 20:4](#), and of unbelievers, [Rev. 20:5](#), cp. [Rev. 20:13](#); (h) the way of access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, [Heb. 10:20](#); (i) the manifestation of Divine power in support of Divine authority, [2 Cor. 13:4](#); cp. [2 Cor. 12:10](#); [1 Cor. 5:5](#); (j) bread, figurative of the Lord Jesus, [John 6:51](#); (k) a stone, figurative of the Lord Jesus, [1 Pet. 2:4](#); (l) water, figurative of the Holy Spirit, [John 4:10](#); [John 7:38](#); (m) a sacrifice, figurative of the believer, [Rom. 12:1](#); (n) stones, figurative of the believer, [1 Pet. 2:5](#); (o) the oracles, *logion*, [Acts 7:38](#), and word, *logos*, [Heb. 4:12](#); [1 Pet. 1:23](#), of God; (p) the physical life of men, [1 Thess. 4:15](#); [Matt. 27:63](#); [Acts 25:24](#); [Rom. 14:9](#); [Phil. 1:21](#) (in the infinitive mood used as a noun, with the article, 'living'),<sup>22</sup>; [1 Pet. 4:5](#); (q) the maintenance of physical life, [Matt. 4:4](#); [1 Cor. 9:14](#); (r) the duration of physical life, [Heb. 2:15](#); (s) the enjoyment of physical life, [1 Thess. 3:8](#); (t) the recovery of physical life from the power of disease, [Mark](#)

[5:23](#); [John 4:50](#); (u) the recovery of physical life from the power of death, [Matt. 9:18](#); [Acts 9:41](#); [Rev. 20:5](#); (v) the course, conduct, and character of men, (1) good, [Acts 26:5](#); [2 Tim. 3:12](#); [Titus 2:12](#); (2) evil, [Luke 15:13](#); [Rom. 6:2](#); [Rom. 8:13](#); [2 Cor. 5:15](#); [Col. 3:7](#); (3) undefined, [Rom. 7:9](#); [Rom. 14:7](#); [Gal. 2:14](#); (w) restoration after alienation, [Luke 15:32](#).

"Note: In [1 Thess. 5:10](#), to live means to experience that change, [1 Cor. 15:51](#), which is to be the portion of all in Christ who will be alive upon the earth at the *Parousia* of the Lord Jesus, cp. [John 11:25](#), and which corresponds to the resurrection of those who had previously died in Christ, [1 Cor. 15:52-54](#).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

**Verse 16.** *For God so loved.* This does not mean that God *approved* the conduct of men, but that he had *benevolent* feelings toward them, or was *earnestly desirous* of their happiness. God hates wickedness, but he still desires the happiness of those who are sinful. *He hates the sin, but loves*

*the sinner.* A parent may love his child and desire his welfare, and yet be strongly opposed to the conduct of that child. When we approve the *conduct* of another, this is the love of *complacency*; when we desire simply their *happiness*, this is the love of *benevolence*.

**The world.** All mankind. It does not mean any particular *part* of the world, but *man as man*-the race that had rebelled and that deserved to die. See [John 6:33](#), [17:21](#).

**His love for the world, or for all mankind, in giving his Son, was shown by these circumstances:**

- **1st.** All the world was in ruin, and exposed to the wrath of God.
- **2nd.** All men were in a hopeless condition.
- **3rd.** God *gave* his Son. Man had no *claim* on him; it was a gift-an undeserved gift.
- **4th.** He gave him up to extreme sufferings, even the bitter pains of death on the cross.
- **5th.** It was for all the world.
  - He tasted "death for every man," [Hebrews 2:9](#).
  - He "died for all," [2 Corinthians 5:15](#).
  - "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world," [1 John 2:2](#).

***That he gave.*** It was a free and unmerited gift.

*Man had no claim; and when there was no eye to pity or arm to save, it pleased God to give his Son into the hands of men to die in their stead, Galatians 1:4; Romans 8:32, Luke 22:19.*

It was the mere movement of love; the expression of eternal compassion, and of a desire that sinners should not perish forever.

***His only-begotten Son.*** John 1:14. This is the highest expression of love of which we can conceive. A parent who should give up his only son to die for others who are guilty-if this could or might be done-would show higher love than could be manifested in any other way. So, **it shows the depth of the love of God, that he was willing to give his only Son into the hands of sinful men that he might be slain, and thus redeem them from eternal sorrow.**

(\*) "For God" 1 John 4:9

**Verse 17.** *To condemn the world. Not to judge, or pronounce sentence on mankind.* God *might* justly have sent him for this. Man deserved condemnation, and it would have been right to have pronounced it; but **God was willing that there should be an offer of pardon, and the sentence of condemnation was delayed.** But, although Jesus did not come then to condemn mankind, yet the time is

coming when he will return to judge the living and the dead, [Acts 17:31](#), [2 Corinthians 5:10](#), [Matthew 25:31-46](#).

(\* ) "For God" [Luke 9:56](#)

- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.

Greek Strong's Number: 2222

**Greek Word:** ζωή

**Transliteration:** zōē

**Phonetic Pronunciation:** [dzo-ay'](#)

**Root:** from [<G2198>](#)

**Cross Reference:** TDNT - 2:832,290

**Part of Speech:** n f

**Vine's Words:** [Life](#), [Living](#), [Lifetime](#), [Life-giving](#)

### Usage Notes:

English Words used in KJV:

life 133

lifetime 1

[Total Count: 134]

from [<G2198>](#) (zao); *life* (literal or figurative) :- life (-time).  
Compare [<G5590>](#) (psuche).

Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary.

- See Vines Word Study:

## **Life-giving**

**Usage Notes:** \* For LIVING also see [BEHAVIOR](#), B, No. 1, LIFE, Nos. 2, 6, and [LIVE](#), No. 3, Note

**Usage Number:** A-1

**Part Of Speech:** Noun

**Strong's Number:** [<G2222>](#)

**Original Word:** ζωή, zōē

**Usage Notes:** (Eng., "zoo," "zoology") is used in the NT "of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, [John 5:26](#), and which the Son manifested in the world, [1 John 1:2](#). From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, [Eph.](#)

[4:18](#), and **of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, [John 3:15](#), who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him,**

**Acts 3:15**, and who is therefore said to be 'the life' of the believer, **Col. 3:4**, for the life that He gives He maintains, **John 6:35**, **63**. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, **John 5:24**; **1 John 3:14**, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, **2 Cor. 5:4**; **2 Tim. 1:10**. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. **Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.**

"*Zōē* is also used of that which is the common possession of all animals and men by nature, **Acts 17:25**; **1 John 5:16**, and of the present sojourn of man upon the earth with reference to its duration, **Luke 16:25**; **1 Cor. 15:19**; **1 Tim. 4:8**; **1 Pet. 3:10**. 'This life' is a term equivalent to 'the gospel,' 'the faith,' 'Christianity,' **Acts 5:20**."\* [\* From Notes on Galatians, by Hogg and Vine. pp. 324,325.]

Death came through sin, **Rom. 5:12**, which is rebellion against God. Sin thus involved the forfeiting of the "life."  
"The life of the flesh is in the blood," **Lev. 17:11**. Therefore

the impartation of "life" to the sinner must be by a death caused by the shedding of that element which is the life of the flesh. "It is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (id., RV). The separation from God caused by the forfeiting of the "life" could be removed only by a sacrifice in which the victim and the offerer became identified. This which was appointed in the typical offerings in Israel received its full accomplishment in the voluntary sacrifice of Christ.

**The shedding of the blood in the language of Scripture involves the taking or the giving of the "life." Since Christ had no sins of his own to die for, His death was voluntary and vicarious, [John 10:15](#) with [Isa. 53:5](#), [10](#), [12](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#).**

In His sacrifice He endured the Divine judgment due to man's sin. By this means the believer becomes identified with Him in His deathless "life," through His resurrection, and enjoys conscious and eternal fellowship with God.

**- Vine's Expository Dictionary**

[Verse 16](#) is undoubtedly the most familiar and beloved verse in all of Scripture. Yet **its very familiarity can cause the profound truth it contains to be overlooked.**

*God's motive for giving "His indescribable gift" of Jesus Christ ([2 Cor. 9:15](#)) was that He loved the evil, sinful world of fallen humanity.*

As noted earlier in this chapter, all humanity is utterly sinful, completely lost, and unable to save itself by any ceremony or effort. Thus, **there was nothing in man that attracted God's love.** Rather He loved because He sovereignly determined to do so.

- **The plan of salvation flowed from "the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind" ([Titus 3:4](#)).**
- ***"God demonstrates His own love toward us," wrote Paul to the Christians in Rome, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" ([Rom. 5:8](#)).***
- John wrote in his first epistle, ***"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love, because He first loved us"*** ([1 John 4:10](#), [19](#)). Such love is so vast, wonderful, and incomprehensible that John, shunning all adjectives, could only write that God so loved the world that He gave His own Beloved Son (cf. [1 John 3:1](#)).

- **World is a nonspecific term for humanity in a general sense.** The statement in [verse 17](#), "that the world might be saved through Him," proves that it does not mean everyone who has ever lived, since all will not be saved. **Verse 16 clearly cannot be teaching universal salvation, since the context promises that unbelievers will perish in eternal judgment (vv. 16-18).** Our Lord is saying that for all in the world there is only one Savior ([1 John 2:2](#)), but only those who are regenerated by the Spirit and who believe in His gospel will receive salvation and eternal life through Him.
  
- **Paul in [2 Corinthians 5:19](#) used the term *world* in a similar way:** *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."* God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not in the sense of universal salvation, but in the sense that the world has no other reconciler.
  
- **That not all will believe and be reconciled is clear from the pleading in [verse 20](#):** *"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

*There are no words in human language that can adequately express the magnitude of God's saving gift to the world. Even the apostle Paul refused to try, declaring that gift to be "indescribable" ([2 Cor. 9:15](#)).*

The Father gave **His only begotten** (unique; one of a kind; cf. the discussion of [1:14](#) in chapter 3 of this volume) **Son**—the One of whom He declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" ([Matt. 3:17](#); cf. [12:18](#); [17:5](#); [2 Peter 1:17](#)); the One whom He "loves... and has given all things into His hand" ([John 3:35](#); cf. [5:20](#); [15:9](#); [17:23](#), [26](#)); the One whom He "highly exalted... and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" ([Phil. 2:9](#)); **the One with whom He had enjoyed intimate fellowship from all eternity ([John 1:1](#))**—to die as a sacrifice on behalf of **sinful men**.

*"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf," wrote Paul, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)).*

In his majestic prophecy of the Suffering Servant Isaiah declared,

*He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;*

*The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,  
And by His scourging we are healed.  
All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him. ([Isa. 53:5-6](#))*

By "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh" ([Rom. 8:3](#)).

**To the Galatians Paul wrote, "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons"** ([Gal. 4:4-5](#)).

*Just as the supreme proof of Abraham's love for God was his willingness to sacrifice his son (cf. [Gen. 22:12, 16-18](#)), so also, but on a far grander scale, the Father's offering of His only begotten Son was the supreme manifestation of His saving love for sinners.*

**God's gracious gift of salvation is freely and only available ([Rom. 5:15-16](#); [6:23](#); [1 John 5:11](#); cf. [Isa. 55:1](#)) to *whoever believes in Christ* ([Luke 8:12](#); [John 1:12](#); [3:36](#); [5:24](#); [6:40](#), [47](#); [8:24](#); [11:25-26](#); [12:46](#); [20:31](#); [Acts 2:44](#); [4:4](#); [5:14](#); [9:42](#); [10:43](#); [13:39](#), [48](#); [16:31](#); [18:8](#); [Rom. 3:21-22](#); [4:3-5](#); [10:4](#), [9-10](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [3:22](#); [Phil. 1:29](#); [1 John 3:23](#); [5:1](#), [13](#)).**

*The free offer of the gospel is broad enough to encompass the vilest sinner ([1 Tim. 1:15](#)), yet narrow enough to exclude all who reject Christ ([John 3:18](#)).*

But to those who come to Him on His terms Jesus gave the marvelous promise, "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" ([John 6:37](#)).

*The guarantee given to those who possess eternal life is that they will never perish. Genuine salvation can never be lost; true believers will be divinely preserved and will faithfully persevere*

([Matt. 10:22](#); [24:13](#); [Luke 8:15](#); [1 Cor. 1:8](#); [Heb. 3:6, 14](#); [10:39](#))  
*because they are kept by God's power* ([John 5:24](#); [6:37-40](#); [10:27-29](#); [Rom. 5:9](#); [8:29-39](#); [1 Cor. 1:4-9](#); [Eph. 4:30](#); [Heb. 7:25](#); [1 Peter 1:4-5](#); [Jude 24](#)).

To **perish** is to receive God's final and eternal judgment. It is true that *God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world;*

Jesus Himself declared in [John 12:47](#), "I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world."

In [Luke 19:10](#) He said, *"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost,"* and Jesus made a

similar statement in [Luke 5:31-32](#): "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*" God will judge those who reject His Son (cf. the discussion of [v. 18](#) below); that judgment, however, was not the mission of the Son in His first coming, but the consequence of sinners rejecting Him ([John 1:10-12](#); [5:24](#), [40](#)).

Jesus' statement in [verse 17](#) also repudiated the popular belief that when Messiah came, he would judge the heathen and the Gentiles—but not the Jews. The prophet Amos had already warned against that foolish misinterpretation of the Day of the Lord:

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord,  
For what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you?  
It will be darkness and not light;  
As when a man flees from a lion  
And a bear meets him,  
Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall  
And a snake bites him.  
Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light,  
Even gloom with no brightness in it? ([Amos 5:18-20](#))

The point of Jesus' coming was not to redeem Israel and condemn the Gentiles, **but that the world might be saved through Him.** **God's gracious offer of salvation extended beyond Israel to all mankind.** Once again, Nicodemus (and by extension the Jewish nation he represented) should have known

that, for **in the Abrahamic covenant God declared**, "*I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed*" ([Gen. 12:3](#); cf. [18:18](#); [22:18](#); [Acts 3:25](#)). Gentile salvation was always God's purpose ([Isa. 42:6-8](#); [55:1](#)).

**- MacArthur New Testament Commentary**

**[3:16](#)** Here is the most famous summary of the gospel in the entire Bible.

***For*** connects to [v. 15](#) and explains what happened to make it possible that someone can "*have eternal life*" ([v. 15](#)), that is, through believing in Christ.

***God so loved the world** was an astounding statement in that context because the OT and other Jewish writings had spoken only of God's love for his people Israel.*

God's love for "the world" made it possible for "whoever" ([v. 15](#)) believes in Christ, not Jews alone, to have eternal life.

*God's love for the world was  
not mere sentiment...  
but led to a specific action:*

He gave his only Son, which John elsewhere explains as sending him to earth as a man ([v. 17](#)) to suffer and die and thereby to bear the penalty for sins (see note on [1 John 2:2](#); cf. [Rom. 3:25](#)). On "only Son," see note on [John 1:14](#), which contains the same Greek phrase.

The purpose of giving his Son was to make God's great gift of eternal life available to anyone—to whoever believes in him, that is, whoever personally trusts in him (see note on [11:25](#)).

*Not perish* means not perish in eternal judgment, in contrast to having *eternal life*, the life of abundant joy and immeasurable blessing in the presence of God forever.

Those who “believe in” Christ **have** that “eternal life” and already experience its blessings in this present time, not yet fully, but in some significant measure.

- **ESV Study Bible**

**3:16** Muslims claim that God could not have a Son because they think Christians are talking about a literal biological offspring of the Father and Mary. However, throughout the NT, and especially in John, sonship refers to the intimate spiritual relationship between God and Jesus.

**3:17** John said that Jesus didn't come to judge or condemn the world ([12:47](#)), but elsewhere we clearly read that Jesus will function as Judge on the last day, condemning some to hell (e.g., [Mt 25:31-46](#)). This is scarcely a contradiction, since John himself recorded that Jesus had all judgment entrusted to Him ([Jn 5:22](#)). The purpose of the incarnation was to offer a plan of salvation for all who would receive it. Those who refuse it simply remain in the condemned state they were already in.

Or, in **C. S. Lewis's words**,

*"There are only two kinds of people in the end; those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'"*

## Twisted Scripture: John 3:16

Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the unique Son of God. According to the Koran, "No son did God beget, nor is there any God along with him" (Surah 23:91). But on nine occasions the Bible refers to Jesus as begotten of the Father. Not only did God declare Him to be His Son at His baptism ([Lk 3:23](#)), but also He proved it by raising Jesus from the dead ([Rm 1:4](#)).

- **The Apologetics Study Bible:  
Understanding Why You Believe.**

**[3:16-18](#)** God, out of love, *gave His One and Only Son* (cp. [1:14,18](#)), so that everyone who believes in Him will *have eternal life* (see notes at [5:26](#) and [14:6](#)).

**John's favorite designation for Jesus is the Son sent by the Father ([3:34-36](#); [5:19-26](#); [6:40](#); [8:35-36](#); [14:13](#); [17:1](#)), imagery taken from the Jewish concept of the *shaliach* (messenger), according to which the sent one is like the sender**

**himself and faithfully pursues the sender's interests (13:16,20).**

**Jesus is that "Sent One" par excellence (9:7), and He in turn sends His disciples (see note at 20:21-22).**

*Being sent implies that the commission, charge, and message are issued by the sender rather than originating with the ones sent. The messengers' role is to fulfill their commission according to their sender's will.*

- HCSB Study Bible.

**3:16 The message of the Good News comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-**

*sacrifice. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the Good News with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.*

**3:16** Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable. But eternal life is not an extension of a person's miserable, mortal life; eternal life is God's life embodied in Christ given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever. *In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity.* Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

**3:16** *To "believe" is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means to put our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable, and relying on him for the power*

*to change.* If you have never trusted Christ, let this promise of everlasting life be yours—and believe.

## Life Application Study Bible.

### Verse 16

**36 tn** Or “this is how much”; or “in this way.” The Greek adverb οὕτως (*houtōs*) can refer (1) to the *degree* to which God loved the world, that is, to such an *extent* or *so much* that he gave his own Son (see R. E. Brown, *John* [AB], 1:133-34; D. A. Carson, *John*, 204) or (2) simply to the *manner* in which God loved the world, i.e., by sending his own son (see R. H. Gundry and R. W. Howell, “The Sense and Syntax of [John 3:14-17](#) with Special Reference to the Use of Οὕτως... ὥστε in [John 3:16](#),” *NovT* 41 [1999]: 24-39). Though the term more frequently refers to the manner in which something is done (see BDAG 741-42 s.v. οὕτω/οὕτως), the following clause involving ὥστε (*hōste*) plus the indicative (which stresses actual, but [usually] unexpected result) emphasizes the greatness of the gift God has given. With this in mind, then, it is likely (3) that John is emphasizing both the *degree* to which God loved the world as well as the *manner* in which He chose to express that love. This is in keeping with John's style of using double entendre or double meaning. Thus, the focus of the Greek construction here is on the *nature* of God's love, addressing its mode, intensity, and extent.

**37 tn** Although this word is often translated “only begotten,” such a translation is misleading, since in English it appears to

express a metaphysical relationship. The word in Greek was used of an only child (a son [[Luke 7:12](#), [9:38](#)] or a daughter [[Luke 8:42](#)]). It was also used of something unique (only one of its kind) such as the mythological Phoenix (1 Clement 25:2). From here it passes easily to a description of Isaac ([Heb 11:17](#) and Josephus, *Ant.* 1.13.1 [1.222]) who was not Abraham's *only* son, but was one-of-a-kind because he was the child of the promise. Thus the word means “one-of-a-kind” and is reserved for Jesus in the Johannine literature of the NT. While all Christians are children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ, *tekna theou*), Jesus is God's Son in a unique, one-of-a-kind sense. The word is used in this way in all its uses in the Gospel of John ([1:14](#), [1:18](#), [3:16](#), and [3:18](#)).

**38 tn** In John the word ἀπόλλυμι (*apollumi*) can mean either (1) to be lost (2) to perish or be destroyed, depending on the context.

**39 sn** The alternatives presented are only two (again, it is typical of Johannine thought for this to be presented in terms of polar opposites): *perish* or *have eternal life*.

### NET Bible.

[3:16](#) *God so loved the world.* Some have insisted that God sent Jesus to die for the purpose of bringing salvation to everyone without exception, but only as a possibility. **However, Jesus makes clear that the salvation of those whom the Father "gives me," and only those, is not a mere possibility but an absolute certainty; "will come to**

*me''* ([6:37-40](#); [10:14-18](#); [17:9](#)). The point made by "the world" is that Christ's saving work is not limited to one time or place but applies to the elect from all over the world. Those who do not receive the remedy God has provided in Christ will perish. It remains true that anyone who believes will not die (be separated from God) but live in God's presence forever. See "God Is Love: Divine Goodness and Faithfulness" at [Ps. 136:1](#).

- **The Reformation Study Bible.**

**See John 1:14&16** for insight on John 3:16

### The Nature of the Incarnation

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ([1:14](#))*

[Verse 14](#) is the most concise biblical statement of the Incarnation, and therefore one of Scripture's most significant verses. **The four words with which it begins, *the Word became flesh*, express the reality that in the Incarnation God took on humanity; the infinite became finite; eternity entered time; the invisible**

**became visible (cf. [Col. 1:15](#)); the Creator entered His creation. God revealed Himself to man in the creation ([Rom. 1:18-21](#)),** the Old Testament Scriptures ([2 Tim. 3:16](#); [2 Peter 1:20-21](#)), and, supremely and most clearly, in Jesus Christ ([Heb. 1:1-2](#)).

The record of His life and work, and its application and significance for the past, present, and future, is in the New Testament.

As noted in the discussion of [1:1](#) in chapter 1 of this volume, **the concept of the Word was one rich in meaning for both Greeks and Jews. John here clearly stated what he implied earlier in the prologue: Jesus Christ, God's final Word to mankind ([Heb. 1:1-2](#)), became flesh. *Sarx* (flesh) does not have here the negative moral connotation that it sometimes carries (e.g., [Rom. 8:3-9](#); [13:14](#); [Gal. 5:13](#), [16-17](#), [19](#); [Eph. 2:3](#)), but refers to man's physical being (cf. [Matt. 16:17](#); [Rom. 1:3](#); [1 Cor. 1:26](#); [2 Cor. 5:16](#); [Gal. 1:16](#); [Eph. 5:29](#); [Phil. 1:22](#)).**

**That He actually *became* flesh affirms Jesus' full humanity.**

*Ginomai* (**became**) does not mean that Christ ceased being the eternal Word when He became a man. Though God is immutable, pure eternal "being" and not "becoming" as all His creatures are, **in the Incarnation the unchangeable ([Heb. 13:8](#)) God did become fully man, yet remained fully God.** He entered the realm of those who are time and space

creatures and experienced life as it is for those He created. In the words of the fifth-century church father Cyril of Alexandria,

*We do not... assert that there was any change in the nature of the Word when it became flesh, or that it was transformed into an entire man, consisting of soul and body; but we say that the Word, in a manner indescribable and inconceivable, united personally... to himself flesh animated with a reasonable soul, and thus became man and was called the Son of man.... The natures which were brought together to form a true unity were different; but out of both is one Christ and one Son. We do not mean that the difference of the natures is annihilated by reason of this union; but rather that the Deity and Manhood, by their inexpressible and inexplicable concurrence into unity, have produced for us the one Lord and Son Jesus Christ.*

No wonder Paul wrote of the Incarnation,

*By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh,*

*Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels,  
Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in  
the world, Taken up in glory. ([1 Tim. 3:16](#))*

[Charles Wesley](#) also captured the wonder of the Incarnation in his majestic hymn *"Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"*:

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail th' incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

**Some found the Incarnation so utterly beyond human reason to comprehend that they refused to accept it.**

The heretical group known as the Docetists (from *dokeō*; "to seem," or "to appear"), accepting the dualism of matter and spirit so prevalent in Greek philosophy at that time, held that matter was evil, and spirit was good. Accordingly, they argued that Christ could not have had a material (and hence evil) body. They taught instead either that His body was a phantom, or an apparition, or that the divine Christ spirit descended upon the mere man Jesus at His baptism, then left Him before His crucifixion. Cerinthus, John's opponent at Ephesus, was a Docetist. John strongly opposed Docetism, which undermines not only the incarnation of Christ, but also His resurrection and

substitutionary atonement. As noted earlier in this chapter, in his first epistle he warned,

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ([1 John 4:1-3](#))*

John was so horrified by Cerinthus's heresy that, as the early church historian Eusebius records,

John the apostle once entered a bath to wash; but ascertaining Cerinthus was within, he leaped out of the place, and fled from the door, not enduring to enter under the same roof with him, and exhorted those with him to do the same, saying, "let us flee, lest the bath fall in, as long as Cerinthus, that enemy of the truth, is within."  
(*Ecclesiastical History*, book III, chap. XXVIII)

The eternal Son not only became man; He also ***dwelt among*** men for thirty-three years. ***Dwelt*** translates a form of the verb ***skēnoō***, which literally means "to live in a tent." Jesus Christ's humanity was not a mere appearance. He took on all the essential attributes of humanity and was "***made in the likeness of men***" ([Phil. 2:7](#)), "since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through

death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" ([Heb. 2:14](#)). As the writer of Hebrews goes on to explain, *"He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people"* ([Heb. 2:17](#)). And He pitched His tent **among us**.

In the Old Testament, God tented with Israel through His glorious presence in the tabernacle ([Ex. 40:34-35](#)) and later in the temple ([1 Kings 8:10-11](#)), and revealed Himself in some pre-incarnate appearances of Christ (e.g., [Gen. 16:7-14](#); [Ex. 3:2](#); [Josh. 5:13-15](#); [Judg. 2:1-4](#); [6:11-24](#); [13:3-23](#); [Dan. 3:25](#); [10:5-6](#); [Zech. 1:11-21](#)). Throughout eternity, God will again tent with His redeemed and glorified people:

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell [skēnoō] among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" ([Rev. 21:3-4](#); cf. [12:12](#); [13:6](#))*

Though Jesus manifested God's divine **glory** during His earthly life with a clarity never before seen, it was still veiled by His human flesh. Peter, James, and John saw a physical manifestation of Jesus' heavenly glory at the transfiguration, when "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light" ([Matt. 17:2](#); cf. [2 Peter 1:16-18](#)). That was a preview of the unveiled glory to be seen at His return ([Matt. 24:29-30](#); [25:31](#);

[Rev. 19:11-16](#)) and the fullness of His heavenly glory as the only Light of the New Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:23](#)). But the disciples saw Jesus manifest God's holy nature primarily by displaying divine attributes, such as truth, wisdom, love, grace, knowledge, power, and holiness.

Jesus manifested the same essential *glory as the Father*, because as God they possess the same nature ([10:30](#)).

*Despite the claims of false teachers through the centuries, monogenēs (only begotten) does not imply that Jesus was created by God and thus not eternal. The term does not refer to a person's origin, but describes him as unique, the only one of his kind. Thus, Isaac could properly be called Abraham's monogenēs ([Heb. 11:17](#)) even though Abraham had other sons, because Isaac alone was the son of the covenant.*

*Monogenēs* distinguishes Christ as the unique Son of God from believers, who are God's sons in a different sense ([1 John 3:2](#)).

B. F. Westcott writes, "*Christ is the One and only Son, the One to whom the title belongs in a sense completely*

*unique and singular, as distinguished from that in which there are many children of God* ([vv. 12f.](#))" (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 12). Jesus' unique relationship to the Father is a major theme of John's gospel (cf. [1:18](#); [3:35](#); [5:17-23](#), [26](#), [36-37](#); [6:27](#), [46](#), [57](#); [8:16](#), [18-19](#), [28](#), [38](#), [42](#), [54](#); [10:15](#), [17](#), [30](#), [36-38](#); [12:49-50](#); [14:6-13](#), [20-21](#), [23](#), [31](#); [15:9](#), [15](#), [23-24](#); [16:3](#), [15](#), [27-28](#), [32](#); [17:5](#), [21](#), [24-25](#); [20:21](#)).

Jesus' manifestation of the divine attributes revealed His essential glory as God's Son, "*for in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*" ([Col. 2:9](#)).

*The two attributes most closely connected with salvation are grace and truth. Scripture teaches that salvation is wholly by believing God's truth in the gospel, by which one receives His saving grace.*

The Jerusalem Council declared, "*But we believe that we [Jewish believers] are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [Gentiles] also are*" ([Acts 15:11](#)). Apollos "greatly helped those who had believed through grace" ([Acts 18:27](#)). Paul described the message he preached as "the gospel of the grace of God" ([Acts 20:24](#)).

*In [Romans 3:24](#) Paul wrote that believers are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."*

In [Ephesians 1:7](#) he added, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." Later in that same letter, Paul wrote:

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).*

He reminded Timothy that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" ([2 Tim. 1:9](#)). That same "grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men" ([Titus 2:11](#)), with the

result that believers "being justified by His grace... would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" ([Titus 3:7](#)).

There is no salvation grace except to those who believe the **truth** of the gospel message. Paul reminded the Ephesians, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" ([Eph. 1:13](#)). In [Colossians 1:5](#) he defined the gospel as the "word of truth" (cf. [James 1:18](#)). Paul expressed to the Thessalonians his thankfulness that "God ha[d] chosen [them] from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" ([2 Thess. 2:13](#)). People are saved when they "come to the knowledge of the truth" ([1 Tim. 2:4](#); cf. [2 Tim. 2:25](#)). On the other hand, "those who perish" will do so "because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" ([2 Thess. 2:10](#)). Everyone will "be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" ([2 Thess. 2:12](#)).

Jesus Christ was the **full** expression of God's grace. All the necessary truth to save is available in Him. He was the **full** expression of God's truth, which was only partially revealed in the Old Testament (cf. [Col. 2:16-17](#)). What was foreshadowed through prophecy, types, and pictures became substance realized in the person of Christ (cf. [Heb. 1:1-2](#)).

**Therefore** He could declare, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life.... If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you*

*will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* ([John 14:6](#); [8:31-32](#)).

A vague belief in God apart from the truth about Christ will not result in salvation. As Jesus Himself warned, "Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" ([John 8:24](#)). Those who think they are worshiping God, but are ignorant of or reject the fullness of the New Testament teaching about Christ, are deceived, because "he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" ([John 5:23](#); cf. [15:23](#)). In his first epistle John affirmed that "whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also" ([1 John 2:23](#); cf. [2 John 9](#)). Those who reject God's full revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ will be eternally lost.

Summarizing the magnificence of this verse, Gerald L. Borchert writes,

In analyzing this crucial verse of the Prologue it becomes quickly apparent that this verse is like a great jewel with many facets that spreads its rays of implication into the various dimensions of Christology—the theology of Christ. As a summary of this verse it may be said that the evangelist recognized and bore witness to the fact that *the characteristics ascribed only to God by the Old Testament were present in the incarnate Logos, God's unique messenger to the world, who not only epitomized in person the awesome sense of God's presence in their midst as a pilgrim people but also evidenced those stabilizing divine qualities God's people had experienced repeatedly.* ([John](#)

[1-11](#), The New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002], 121-22. Italics in original.)

## The Witnesses to the Incarnation

*John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ([1:15-16](#))*

In keeping with his purpose in writing his gospel ([20:31](#)), John brought in other witnesses to the truth about the divine, preexistent, incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. He first called on **John** the Baptist, who also **testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"** John's testimony will be related in more detail beginning in [verse 19](#). Here the apostle John merely summarizes it. John the Baptist, of course, had died long before this gospel was written. But as noted in chapter 2 of this volume, there was still a John the Baptist cult in existence. So as he did in [verse 8](#), the apostle notes John the Baptist's inferiority to Christ—this time in the Baptist's own words. In contrast to some of his followers, he understood clearly and accepted gladly his subordinate role.

That John **cried out** speaks of the bold, public nature of his witness to Jesus; he was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths

straight!" ([Matt. 3:3](#)). He was the herald, proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah, and calling people to repent and prepare their hearts to receive Him. Acknowledging Jesus' preeminence John said of Him, "**He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.**" Jesus, the Expected (lit., "coming") One ([Matt. 11:3](#); [Luke 7:19-20](#); [John 6:14](#)) came **after** John in time; He was born six months later ([Luke 1:26](#)) and began His public ministry after John began his. Yet, as John acknowledged, Jesus had **a higher rank than** he did, **for He existed before** him. The reference here, as in [verses 1](#) and [2](#), is to Jesus' eternal preexistence (cf. [8:58](#)).

Then John called on the testimony of believers, including himself and **all** who **have received** the **fullness** of blessing from the one who is "full of grace and truth" ([v. 14](#)). Because in Christ "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" ([Col. 2:9](#)), He provides for all His people's needs ([Rom. 5:2](#); [Eph. 4:12-13](#); [Col. 1:28](#); [2:10](#); [2 Peter 1:3](#)). That abundant supply will never be exhausted or diminished; **grace** will continually follow **grace** in a limitless, never-ending flow (cf. [2 Cor. 12:9](#); [Eph. 2:7](#)).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – John 1-11.

**MERCY, MERCIFUL** A personal characteristic of care for the needs of others. The biblical concept of mercy always involves help to those who are in need or distress. Such help covers a broad range, from assistance in finding a bride to God's forgiveness of sin. A wide vocabulary is employed in the original languages to express these concepts, and an even wider vocabulary is found in English translations.

**Mercy in the Old Testament** Three main Hebrew roots involve the idea of mercy. 1. *Racham/rachamim* This word family consistently has the meaning of showing mercy, compassion, or pity. Related to the word for womb, it may have the connotation of a mother's affection or of the bond between siblings. This sense of a mother's compassion for her child is found in [1 Kings 3:26](#), and a similar expression describes Joseph's feelings for his brother in [Genesis 43:30](#). Likewise, God's mercy is often likened to family relationships: as a father to his children ([Jer. 31:20](#); [Ps. 103:13](#); [Isa. 63:15-16](#)), a husband to a wife ([Isa. 54:6-8](#); [Hos. 2:19](#)), a brother to a brother ([Amos 1:11](#)), even as a mother toward a nursing child ([Isa. 49:15](#)).

God's mercy is bound up with His covenant with Israel. He is merciful to them because He chose them ([Ex. 33:19](#); [2 Kings 13:23](#); [Isa. 54:10](#), [63:7](#)). God's mercy is never just a feeling but is expressed by His action: providing for Israel in the wilderness ([Neh. 9:19](#); [Isa. 49:10](#)) and delivering her from enemies ([Pss. 69:16-21](#); [79:8-11](#); [Isa. 30:18](#); [Jer. 42:11-12](#)). When Israel turned from God, He showed no pity ([Isa. 9:17](#); [27:11](#); [Jer. 13:14](#); [16:5](#); [Hos. 1:6-8](#); [2:4](#)). On the other hand, He is a forgiving God and shows mercy to a penitent people ([Pss. 25:4-7](#); [40:11-12](#); [51:1-4](#); [Prov. 28:13-14](#); [Isa. 54:7](#); [55:7](#); [Lam. 3:31-](#)

[33](#); [Dan. 9:9](#); [Mic. 7:19](#); [Hab. 3:2](#)). He is merciful in restoring the nation ([Ps. 102:13](#); [Isa. 14:1](#); [49:13](#); [Jer. 12:15](#); [30:18](#); [33:26](#); [Ezek. 39:25](#); [Zech. 1:16](#); [10:6](#)) and renewing His friendship with them ([Hos. 2:19,23](#)). God's mercy is the very source of His people's life ([Pss. 103:4](#); [119:77,156](#)).

*Racham* is also used to describe human mercy or lack of it. Israel's enemies were merciless ([Isa. 13:18](#), [47:6](#); [Jer. 6:23](#); [21:7](#); [50:42](#)). In legal contexts, Israel was to show no mercy to criminals ([Deut. 13:8](#); [19:13,21](#)). On the other hand, God expected His people to be merciful to their neighbors ([1 Kings 8:31-32](#); [Prov. 3:29](#); [21:13](#)). He especially expected their mercy toward the poor and needy ([Zech. 7:9-10](#)).

**2. *Chesed*** *Chesed* occurs 245 times in the Old Testament, 127 in Psalms alone. The Septuagint translators regularly rendered it with the Greek word for mercy, *eleos*. Likewise, the King James version translates it regularly as mercy or kindness. See [Kindness](#). Other English versions render it as “steadfast love” (NRSV), “lovingkindness” (NAS), “loyalty” or “constant love” (REB), “love” or “unfailing love” (NIV), “faithfulness” (TEV).

Like *racham*, *chesed* describes a variety of human relationships: husband and wife ([Gen. 20:13](#)), next-of-kin ([Gen. 24:49](#)), father and son ([Gen. 47:29](#)), host and guest (Rahab and the spies—[Josh. 2:12-14](#)), friends like David and Jonathan ([1 Sam. 20:8,14-17](#)), king and subjects ([2 Sam. 2:5](#)). Also like *racham*, it expresses itself in action: Rahab delivered the spies; Jonathan protected David from Saul. The relationship is always reciprocal. One who experiences the *chesed* of another is to reciprocate when the opportunity presents itself. Thus, the spies promised protection for Rahab, and David pledged to protect the

house of Jonathan. An element of covenantal fidelity was involved. An element of mercy was also involved. Each sought to meet the other's need. Since one can scarcely meet a need of God, this covenantal aspect of mercy was expressed in God's requirement to show mercy to others. This was often coupled with a command for justice ([Mic. 6:8](#); compare [Hos. 12:6](#); [Zech. 7:9](#)).

God expects His people to show *chesed* to one another because He shows *chesed* to them—to individuals such as Abraham ([Gen. 24:12-14](#)), Jacob ([Gen. 32:10](#)), David ([2 Sam. 7:15](#)), and Job ([10:12](#)). Above all, He was merciful to His chosen people Israel ([Ex. 15:13](#); [Ps. 107:8,15,21,31](#); [Isa. 63:7](#); [Jer. 31:2-6](#)). The linkage of God's covenant and His *chesed* is explicit in such phrases as “keeping covenant and showing *chesed*” ([1 Kings 8:23](#); [Deut. 7:9](#); [Neh. 1:5](#); [9:32](#); [Dan. 9:4](#); compare [Ps. 106:45](#); [Isa. 54:10](#)).

A final characteristic of God's *chesed* is its permanence ([Pss. 23:6](#); [25:6](#); [103:17](#); [117:2](#); [Isa. 54:8](#)). This is often expressed in the set phrase, “for the Lord is good, his mercy (*chesed*) is everlasting” or “his mercy endureth forever” ([Pss. 100:5](#); [106:1](#); [107:1](#); [118:1](#); [1 Chron. 16:34](#); [2 Chron. 5:13](#); [7:3](#); [Ezra 3:11](#); [Jer. 33:11](#); compare [Pss. 118:2-4](#); [136:1-26](#)).

**3. *Chanan/chen*** This is the third Hebrew word family involving mercy and pity. Job used it in appealing for pity ([19:21](#)) and with it the psalmist described one who is generous to the poor ([Pss. 37:21](#); [112:5](#); compare [Prov. 14:21-23](#); [19:17](#); [28:8](#)). The latter examples show how *chanan* involves not only pity but also being gracious. It is in this sense that the word is applied to God, referring to His gracious and generous nature.

**4. Conclusion** It is difficult to draw precise distinctions between the various words used in the Old Testament for God's mercy and grace. *Racham*, *chesed*, and *chanan* all refer to the one gracious, forgiving, loving God who is forever faithful in reaching out to His people in their need. Nowhere is their interrelatedness more evident than in the following recurrent Old Testament liturgy which combines all three: "God is merciful (*racham*) and gracious (*chana*), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*chesed*) and faithfulness" ([Ex. 34:6](#); [Num. 14:18](#); [Neh. 9:17](#); [Pss. 86:15](#); [103:8](#); [145:8](#); [Joel 2:13](#); [Jonah 4:2](#)).

**Mercy in the New Testament** Three word families express the idea of mercy in the New Testament.

**1. *Splagchna*** *Splagchna* literally refers to the upper human organs (heart, liver, lungs). This usage appears in the grim depiction of Judas' death in [Acts 1:18](#). Much like the Hebrew *rachamim*, *splagchna* developed the derived sense of strong emotional feelings, particularly of compassion and affection. The word is often used of Jesus' compassion—for the multitudes ([Matt. 9:36](#), [14:14](#), [15:32](#)), for the blind ([Matt. 20:34](#)), for a leper ([Mark 1:41](#)), for a possessed child ([Mark 9:20-27](#)), for a widow's plight ([Luke 7:13](#)). His parables use the term to describe the mercy of a master on his indebted servant ([Matt. 18:27](#)), the compassion of a father for his prodigal son ([Luke 15:20](#)), and a Samaritan's pity for a wounded Jew ([Luke 10:33](#)). With this word Paul urged the Corinthians to renew their affection for him ([2 Cor. 6:12](#); compare [7:15](#)), exhorted the Philippians to mutual love and concern ([Phil. 2:1-2](#)), and played on the sympathy of Philemon ([Philem. 7,12,20](#)). With it, John reminded his readers that one who closes his heart to a brother's need scarcely has God's love ([1 John 3:17](#)).

**2. *Oiktirmos*** This word also means “pity, mercy, compassion” and is used together with *splagchna* in [Colossians 3:12](#), [Philippians 2:1](#), and [James 5:11](#). It can be used negatively as in [Hebrews 10:28](#) where it describes the merciless justice of the Law. Paul pointed to the positive side of God as “the father of mercies” ([2 Cor. 1:3](#)), and he urged the Romans to sacrificial service based on God’s mercy ([12:1](#)). Christian mercy is rooted in God’s mercy, a principle already given by Jesus ([Luke 6:36](#)).

**3. *Eleos*** The most common words in the New Testament for mercy belong to the *eleos* family. In secular Greek, the word was often viewed as a sign of weakness, a sentimental inclination to be overly lenient. The New Testament does not share in this assessment, having more in common with the Old Testament perspective on God’s mercy.

To be sure, the negative aspect appears. Drawing on [Exodus 33:19](#), Paul showed how God in His sovereign purposes can withdraw His mercies ([Rom. 9:15-16,18,23](#)). The total New Testament picture is much brighter. Jesus brought the good news of a merciful, forgiving God. He embodied that good news in Himself, and everywhere He was met by cries and expectations for mercy—from two blind men ([Matt. 9:27](#)), a woman with a possessed daughter ([Matt. 15:22](#)), the father of an epileptic boy ([Matt. 17:15](#)), and by ten lepers ([Luke 17:13](#)). His healings are themselves testimony to the divine mercy ([Mark 5:19](#)).

Reminiscent of *chesed*, Jesus’ birth and that of John are testimonies that God is both merciful and faithful to His promises ([Luke 1:58,72,78](#)). Paul had a keen awareness of God’s mercy in his own life ([1 Cor. 7:25](#); [2 Cor. 4:1](#); [1 Tim. 1:13,16](#)), and in restoring his co-worker Epaphroditus to health ([Phil. 2:27](#)).

God's mercy was shown in His readiness to forgive the penitent sinner ([Luke 8:13](#)). Especially was it transparent in the atoning work of Christ ([Heb. 2:17](#)). Through Christ, God's mercy delivers from the death of sin into life ([Eph. 2:4-5](#)) and includes the Gentiles as part of His people ([Rom. 11:30-32](#)). In Christ the mercy of God brings new life ([1 Pet. 1:3](#)) and undergirds the hope of life to come ([Jude 21](#)). In this life the mercy of God is always available for those who approach His throne ([Heb. 4:16](#)). The Christian life is lived under this assurance of God's mercy. This is why mercy is often an element in New Testament greetings and benedictions ([1 Tim. 1:2](#); [2 Tim. 1:2](#); [Gal. 6:16](#); [2 John 3](#); [Jude 2](#)). See [Greetings](#); [Benedictions](#).

Those who experience God's mercy are themselves to be merciful. God does not desire the external trappings of religiosity but deeds of mercy to others ([Matt. 9:13](#); [12:7](#); [23:23](#)). One who shows no mercy to others cannot expect God's mercy ([Matt. 18:33-34](#); [Jas. 2:13](#)). Mercy is a mark of discipleship ([Matt. 5:7](#)). Disciples show deeds of mercy to a neighbor ([Luke 10:36-37](#)) and perform them cheerfully ([Rom. 12:8](#)). God is mercy, and one who shares in God's wisdom shares His mercy ([Jas. 3:17](#)).

**4. Conclusion** As with the Old Testament, the New Testament treatment of God's mercy cannot be separated from His love, His grace, and His faithfulness. They are all part of the same fabric. The difference, of course, is that the New Testament writers had come to see the mercy of God in a much brighter light in the face of Jesus Christ. He was the ultimate manifestation of God's mercy, the assurance of that mercy for believers, and the basis of their own mercy in their relationships with others. - **John Polhill**

- **Holman Bible Dictionary.**

**GRACE** Undeserved acceptance and love received from another, especially the characteristic attitude of God in providing salvation for sinners. For Christians, the word “grace” is virtually synonymous with the gospel of God’s gift of unmerited salvation in Jesus Christ. To express this, the New Testament writers used the Greek word *charis*, which had a long previous history in secular Greek. Related to the word for joy or pleasure, *charis* originally referred to something delightful or attractive in a person, something which brought pleasure to others. From this it came to have the idea of a favor or kindness done to another or of a gift which brought pleasure to another. Viewed from the standpoint of the recipient, it was used to refer to the thankfulness felt for a gift or favor. These meanings also appear in the biblical use of *charis*, but only in the New Testament does it come to have the familiar sense which “grace” bears for Christians.

**Grace in the Old Testament** No one word in the Hebrew Old Testament is equivalent to the New Testament use of *charis* for God’s unmerited gift of salvation. The translators of the Greek Old Testament characteristically translated the Hebrew word *chanan/chen* as *charis*, and the King James Version likewise often translates this as “grace” or “favor” or “mercy.” The Hebrew verb *chanan* occurs some 56 times in the Old Testament and refers to the kind turning of one person to another in an act of assistance, such as aid to the poor ([Prov. 14:31](#)). In the Psalms it is frequently used to call upon the gracious assistance of God in

times of need ([Pss. 4:1](#); [6:2](#); [25:16](#); [31:9](#); [86:3](#); [86:16](#); [123:3](#)). In other instances God is said to make one attractive or favorable in the eyes of another ([Gen. 39:21](#); [Ex. 3:21](#); [11:3](#); [12:36](#)). It is the latter meaning of “favor” which the noun *chen* especially conveys. Of its 70 occurrences in the Old Testament, 43 are in the stereotyped expression “to find favor/grace in the eyes/sight of another.” Most commonly this expression refers to persons seeking or obtaining the favor of another (Jacob from Esau—[Gen. 32:5](#); [33:8](#); Joseph from Potiphar—[Gen. 39:14](#); Ruth from Boaz—[Ruth 2:2,10](#); Esther from Ahasuerus—[Esther 2:17](#)). More rarely it refers to a person receiving God’s special favor (Noah—[Gen. 6:8](#); Moses—[Ex. 33:12-19](#); Gideon—[Judg. 6:17](#)). In none of these instances, however, is there any emphasis on the recipient’s lack of merit as in the New Testament concept of “grace.” Closest to this idea are the few passages in the prophets which refer to God’s gracious favor to Israel in delivering her from captivity and restoring the nation ([Jer. 31:2](#); [Zech. 4:7](#); [12:10](#)).

Other Hebrew words convey the idea of God’s grace, such as *racham/rachamim* (“mercy”) and *chesed* (“steadfast covenant love”). These words are often combined with *chen* to refer to the one merciful, loving, gracious God ([Ex. 34:6](#); [Neh. 9:17](#); [Pss. 86:15](#); [103:8](#); [145:8](#); [Joel 2:13](#); [Jonah 4:2](#)). Together they convey something of the New Testament sense of God’s grace, but even then they lack the sense of this being an unmerited favor of God. To be sure, the idea that Israel did not deserve God’s mercy and love is found in the Old Testament ([Deut. 7:7-10](#); [9:4-6](#)). God promised David that He would not remove His love from David’s successor, even though the successor sinned ([2 Sam. 7:14-16](#)). The entire Book of Jonah deals with God’s merciful concern to save the wicked Ninevites, and Hosea powerfully

conveys God's undeserved mercy and grace with the image of the prophet's love for the faithless Gomer. God's grace shines forth clearly in the Exodus, where God delivered an undeserving people before they entered into His covenant. Still, it remained for the New Testament writers to catch the full vision of God grace in the light of Jesus Christ.

**Grace in the New Testament** We owe our distinctly Christian understanding of grace to the apostle Paul. The Pauline epistles employ the word *charis* and its related forms twice as frequently as the rest of the New Testament writings combined. Paul sometimes employed the word with its more secular meanings. He urged his readers to make their speech "gracious" or "attractive" ([Col. 4:6](#); [Eph. 4:29](#)), and referred to his visit to Corinth as a "grace" which would bring them pleasure ([2 Cor. 1:15](#) NAS text note). The idea of gift also appears, especially in reference to his collection for the Jerusalem saints ([1 Cor. 16:3](#); [2 Cor. 8:1,4,6,7,19](#)). Often he used *charis* to mean thanks, as in the thanksgiving over a meal ([1 Cor. 10:30](#)) or in songs of praise ([Col. 3:16](#)). Frequently he employed the set expression "Thanks" ("*charis* be to God" ([Rom. 6:17](#), [7:25](#); [1 Cor. 15:57](#); [2 Cor. 2:14](#); [8:16](#); [9:15](#); [1Tim. 1:12](#); [2 Tim. 1:3](#))). One wonders if for Paul this common Greek idiom did not carry a deeper nuance. It was precisely his experience of God's grace that led to his profound sense of thanksgiving.

Paul's sense of God's grace owed much to his experience of being turned from the persecutor of the church to Christ's missionary to the Gentiles ([1 Cor. 15:9-10](#); [1 Tim. 1:12-14](#)). So convinced was he that this was all God's doing and not of his own merit that he could describe his apostolic calling as coming

even before his birth ([Gal. 1:15](#)). He was an apostle solely because of God's grace ([Rom. 1:5](#)), and his entire ministry and teaching were due to that divine grace ([Rom. 12:3](#); [15:15](#); [1 Cor. 3:10](#); [2 Cor. 1:12](#); [Gal. 2:9](#); [Eph. 3:2,7,8](#)).

Paul had too profound a sense of human sin to believe that a person could ever earn God's acceptance ([Rom. 3:23](#)). As a Pharisee, he had sought to do that by fulfilling the divine law. Now he had come to see that it was not a matter of earning God's acceptance but rather of coming to accept God's acceptance of him through Jesus Christ. So, he came to see a sharp antithesis between law and grace. Law is the way of self-help, of earning one's own salvation. Grace is God's way of salvation, totally unearned ([Rom. 3:24](#); [4:4](#); [11:6](#); [Eph. 2:8](#)). Grace is appropriated by faith in what God has done in Christ ([Rom. 4:16](#)). God's grace comes to sinners, not to those who merit God's acceptance ([Rom. 5:20-21](#)). It is through Christ's atoning work on the cross that God's grace comes to us, setting us free from the bondage of sin ([Rom. 3:24-31](#)). Christ is the Representative who breaks the reign of sin and brings life and acceptance with God through divine grace ([Rom. 5:15](#), [17](#)). God's grace is so bound up with Christ that Paul could speak of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" ([2 Cor. 8:9](#); [2 Tim. 2:1](#)). It was in the beloved Son that God's grace came supremely to mankind ([1 Cor. 1:4](#); [Eph. 1:6-7](#); compare [2 Tim. 1:9](#)). For Paul, grace is practically synonymous with the gospel. Grace brings salvation ([Eph. 2:5](#), [8](#)). Grace brings eternal life ([Rom. 5:21](#); [Titus 3:7](#)). To share in the gospel is to be a partaker of grace ([Phil. 1:7](#); [Col. 1:6](#)). In Christ Jesus, God's grace is open to all people ([Titus 2:11](#); compare [2 Cor. 4:15](#)); but the experience of

God's grace is conditional upon human response. It can be rejected or accepted ([2 Cor. 6:1](#); [Gal. 1:6](#); [5:4](#)).

From the human perspective, the divine grace is a power which undergirds the present life. God's grace abides *in* us ([2 Cor. 9:14](#)); we stand in it ([Rom. 5:2](#)). Our calling, our witness, our works are all based on the power of God's grace in our lives ([2 Thess. 1:11-12](#)). Paul sharply rejected any antinomian perversion of the gospel which failed to recognize that the true experience of God's grace changes one's life in the direction of righteousness ([Rom. 6:1,14-15](#)). Grace never gives freedom to sin. His own experience had shown him a new power of the divine grace active in his ministry in spite of his human weakness ([2 Cor. 12:9](#)). In fact, all who experience God's grace have gifts of that grace for ministry and service ([Rom. 12:6](#); [Eph. 4:7](#)). So pervasive was Paul's sense of God's grace that he always referred to it in the opening or closing of his letters. His usual salutation includes a wish for "grace" and "peace" upon his readers ([Rom. 1:7](#); [1 Cor. 1:3](#)). Here Paul played upon the normal word of salutation in Greek letters (*chairein-joy*). *Charis* has a similar sound, but a world of difference. For the Christian, a reminder of God's grace in their lives is the richest word of greeting and the fullest source of joy.

Surprisingly the word "grace" does not occur in Matthew or Mark. The concept is there, in Jesus' ministry to sinners and outcasts, in His healing ministry, and in such teachings as the parable of the laborers in the vineyard ([Matt. 20:1-8](#)). Luke, however, made extensive use of *charis* in both his writings. Sometimes he used it with basically secular meanings, such as "credit, benefit" ([Luke 6:32-34](#) NAS), as "thanks" ([Luke 17:9](#)),

or as attractiveness in speech ([Luke 4:22](#)). The familiar Old Testament idea of “favor” appears a number of times, sometimes referring to the favor of one human to another ([Acts 2:47](#); [7:10](#); [24:27](#); [25:3,9](#); [Luke 2:52](#)), sometimes to God’s favor bestowed on individuals ([Luke 1:28,30](#); [2:40](#); [Acts 7:46](#)). Reminiscent of Paul are the references in Acts which refer to salvation or to the gospel as “grace” ([Acts 11:23](#); [13:43](#); [18:27](#); [20:24,32](#)). Particularly Pauline is the reference to salvation through the grace of the Lord Jesus in [Acts 15:11](#). Also like Paul are those places where grace is described as an enabling power in the ministries of various Christians ([Acts 4:33](#); [6:8](#) NAS; [14:26](#); [15:40](#)).

Grace only occurs three times in John’s Gospel, all in the prologue (ch. 1), and all in a sense reminiscent of Paul. Grace is equated with truth ([1:14](#)), its gift nature is emphasized ([1:16](#)), and it is set in antithesis to the law of Moses ([1:17](#)). In the remainder of the Johannine corpus, grace occurs only three times, all in benedictions ([2 John 3](#); [Rev. 1:4](#); [22:21](#)). In the Johannine writings the idea of God’s unmerited gift in Christ is very present, but conveyed by a different word—*agape* (love).

References to grace in the other New Testament writings do not extend beyond the meanings found in the Pauline epistles and Luke-Acts. Secular meanings of *charis* occur, such as “gratitude” ([Heb. 12:28](#)) and “credit” ([1 Pet. 2:19-20](#) NAS). Grace is connected with God’s mercy ([Heb. 4:16](#)) and with the atoning death of Christ ([Heb. 2:9](#)). It is virtually equated with the gospel ([1 Pet. 5:10](#)) and with salvation ([1 Pet. 1:10,13](#)). It is seen as a power which strengthens life ([Heb. 13:9](#)), undergirds those who are persecuted ([1 Pet. 5:10](#)), and grants gifts for

Christian service ([1 Pet. 4:10](#)). God's grace can be spurned ([Heb. 10:29](#); [12:14-15](#)) or turned into a perverted gospel promising freedom from the law and thus freedom to sin without judgment ([Jude 4](#)). Above all, grace is the hallmark of the Christian experience and thus a frequent component in benedictions ([Heb. 13:25](#); [1 Pet. 1:2](#); [2 Pet. 1:2](#)). See [Mercy](#); [Love](#); [Justification](#).

**John Polhill**

## **Holman Bible Dictionary.**

What comes to mind when you hear: "Your Christmas Gift?" (Getting or Giving?)

Key thoughts, texts, & quotes:

Gifts =

- Truth (defines real reality)
- Love (moves & motivates Messiah & missions)
- Gospel (integrates & invites)
- Grace (initiates & informs)
- Mercy (inspects & inspires)
- 
- the miracle... (John 6:44)

# The DisciplesPath – Journey With Jesus

(curriculum)

**VOLUME 1:** 1. What Just Happened? 2. The Centrality of Christ  
3. Baptism 4. Time with Jesus 5. The Blessing of Community 6. Joining Jesus  
on Mission 7. The Importance of Discipleship 8. Defining a Disciple 9. Jesus  
Calls His Disciples 10. Jesus Teaches His Disciples 11. Jesus Equips His  
Disciples 12. Jesus Sends His Disciples 13. Review/Fellowship

**VOLUME 2:** 1. Who Is Jesus? 2. What Did Jesus Do? 3. Following  
Jesus 4. The Priorities of a Disciple 5. The Cost of a Discipleship 6. The Fruit  
of a Disciple 7. The Doctrine of God 8. The Doctrine of Humanity 9. The  
Person and Work of Christ 10. The Kingdom of God 11. The Doctrine of the  
Holy Spirit 12. The Doctrine of the Church 13. Review/Fellowship

**VOLUME 3:** 1. Immersed in the Word 2. Connected Through Prayer  
3. Living in Community 4. Spirit-Filled Life 5. Serving His Kingdom 6.  
Spreading the Good News 7. Christ Came to Us 8. Christ Came with a Mission  
9. Christ Came to Die 10. We Die with Christ 11. We Go with Christ 12. We  
Go Together with Christ 13. Review/Fellowship

**VOLUME 4:** 1. Return to the Gospel 2. Seeing the Big Picture 3. The God  
Who Sends 4. Our Work in the World 5. Compelled by Love 6. Reversing the  
Curse 7. Living by the Spirit's Power 8. All Things to All People 9. Producing  
Spiritual Fruit 10. The Commitment to Disciple-Making 11. Disciple Through  
Strong Relationships 12. Who Is a Disciple-Maker? 13. Review & Commission

- 2 Peter 1:3
- Link all "big ideas" of the series
- Link all "gift of God" Passages
- Link "common" with the Gift of:

"only begotten"

"everything"

"Light of the world" (He was & now we are!)

"all authority..."

"with you always, even to the end..."

John 17 koinonia

Acts 2 homothoomadon

"blessed are the..."

"transformation..." (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

"adoption"

given the "heart of God"

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (like a river in the desert!)

"fruit of the Spirit"

"hope of the world"

"ambassadorships"