

GOD LOVED THE WORLD...

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 eternal life.

This verse preaches both Law and Gospel. It preaches the Law in at least three ways:

First, God had to give his one and only Son because mankind fell into sin. That sin isn't just something in the distant past, like a bill your great-grandfather was late in paying. No, the sin of Adam and Eve sticks to us, it infects everything we try to do. It's our sinful human nature, and even though we're born with it, they weren't. It's the incurable disease we live with our whole lives, that slowly drags us down, down into the grave. It ruins every attempt at a good deed. It spoils every song we try to sing to praise God, every act of kindness we do from a thankful heart. But it's not alone.

Second, this verse preaches our sinfulness with the word "perish." This isn't human death, the death of the body. It's the other two kinds of death. The first of those is the death of the soul, which is unbelief. Jesus hangs on to us through the faith he gives us, and even though we're afraid sometimes that our faith gets shaken, he says about each of us sinners that he loves: "No one will take her out of my hands."^a It isn't the strength of your faith that your salvation depends upon. It's the infinite strength of God who holds you in his arms forever. The third death of course is to perish forever without end, suffering in hell. The only rescue from eternal suffering is Jesus, and brings us to the third way our verse preaches the Law:

As Jesus says, "Whoever believes in him," there is something lurking over in the shadows. Jesus means himself, that our faith rests in Jesus Christ, and in no one else. This means listening to the Word of God that preaches Christ, which is every syllable of the Holy Scriptures. This is the light that drives away the shadows where people are tempted to rely on themselves, or in astrology, or in their horoscope, instead of in Christ alone. People who try to sell us on the idea of looking to the stars for guidance or to meditate on our belly buttons for wisdom want us to think that there are many ways to enlightenment, many paths to wisdom. But there is only one path from our fallen sinful state to life in heaven: That one path is Jesus alone.

When God's Word makes me uncomfortable, that means it is doing its good work in my heart, and showing me that I need a Savior for my sins. I need to be lifted out of the pit of my failure and set free from the prison of my guilt. And those temptations and failures will not stop. A wise believer said, a long time ago, "**If you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation.**"^b

^a Hosea 2:10

^b Sirach 2:1

So here comes Jesus, preaching the Gospel to my ears, to heal my broken heart, to pull me up out of the pit, to break open the doors of my prison. To stand with me during my temptations. Here is Jesus, showing me God's love.

I, GOD'S LOVE WAS THERE BEFORE CREATION.

Q. 7^a

God so loved the world that before he called it into being, he planned that you, yourself, would be a part of it. That's the relationship you have with God. Not that he doesn't notice you, or that he may or may not discover you, but that he planned all that there has even been so that you would be his child, his dear friend, in eternity with him. "God's love brings peace to my relationship with him."

II, GOD'S LOVE IS THERE AT THE CROSS.

Q. 110

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, This giving is only partly shown in the manger. That was only the beginning, the delivery. The preaching and teaching of Jesus was the true package, but the gift, the great gift of the giving of the one and only Son of God, was on the cross. This was the plan of God all along, to atone for the sins of mankind in one sacrificial act, for the spilled blood that surged from the flesh of God on Calvary would and did pay the price for the sins of his beloved creation. Even mine. "Even though we fail in our attempts to keep God's commandments, we are confident that we are saved."

III, GOD'S LOVE IS THERE IN JESUS' RESURRECTION.

Q. 145

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. This giving was fulfilled and completed in Jesus' death, and proved by his resurrection from the dead. If Jesus had been an imposter, or if Jesus had failed in some way, if Jesus had given in to any temptation at all, the Father would have shown his displeasure and left him in the grave. But he didn't. Nothing escape's the Father's sight, and everything that Jesus did on our behalf was perfect and it was complete. The Father also showed Jesus' divinity and his place in the holy Trinity with his resurrection. "God reminds me that Jesus is truly God with his name with his resurrection."

IV, GOD'S LOVE WAS THERE AT MY BAPTISM.

Q. 180

God so loved the word that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him. The rescue of Baptism is the sacrament God planned for us that would wash us clean, not only by water, but by a miracle through God's own powerful word. For baptism is not just water to wash off dirt, but it is the word of God that forgives our sins, delivers us from death and from the clutches of the devil, and gives eternal salvation to everyone who believes this-- and baptism even gives the faith through which these blessings come. "Redemption and forgiveness are ours by faith."

V, GOD'S LOVE IS THERE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Q. 143

^a The seven points marked "Q." in the margin are question numbers from the 2017 Catechism workbook.

God so loved the world that the devil's plan to ruin us, to wreck our faith, to wander from God's path, is exposed through the preaching of the Gospel again and again, week by week my whole life through. And the Lord God offers to us and gives to us his forgiveness again and again through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. No, we do not deserve God's love and compassion. Yes, we receive God's love and compassion simply because he loves us, and **in** the bread and the wine **are** the body and blood of Christ, as Jesus himself says: This is my body, this is my blood.

We would not need God's sacrament more than once in a lifetime, and God washed us clean once for all in our baptism. But God knows our struggle. He knows our temptations. He knows our failures, and so he offers his forgiveness again and again at the communion table, and God loved us so much that he keeps giving it again and again our whole life through. "Our Father has rescued us from the devil's plan through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, the Means of Grace."

VI, GOD'S LOVE IS THERE IN MY WHOLE LIFE & DEATH

Q. 121

God so loved the world and me, too, that throughout my whole life he is with me, even up to the moment of my death. Here is where some people might say, why doesn't he talk to me? Why doesn't he tell me? Why won't God give me just one sign? Well, he does. He has. Here it is in his word, in the Bible that's been at your elbow your whole life through. Through the Gospel God has been teaching me (1) Who he is, and that he's been there all along. He has been teaching me (2) What he has done about mankind's sin, my sin, and (3) he has been teaching me all along that it was his one and only Son Jesus who rescued me, and that my salvation is already accomplished and finished by what Jesus did, when he died on the cross.

VII, GOD'S LOVE IS THERE IN MY RESURRECTION AND ENTRANCE INTO ETERNITY.

"Whoever believes in God's one and only Son will have eternal life." Why are you saved? It isn't an achievement. It is what sticks you to Christ, not on account of what you do, and not for the sake of something God sees in you, or in view of anything in you. You are saved on account of Christ, for the sake of the merits of Jesus, in view of his life and death. Your eternal life is all about Jesus, brought about with you in mind, but entirely at his doing.

Just as God did not create the world using any of my power or talent or merit, so also God brought about my salvation using only his power, not mine. Using only the talent of Jesus' obedience, and not mine. In view of the merits of Jesus Christ, not me or you or anyone else. God's love is there in my resurrection, and "I remember that salvation is only in Jesus Christ."

In Greek, the first word of this verse is the one we translate "so." This reminds me that God loved and still loves me so much, so powerfully, so thoughtfully, so dearly, so unshakingly, so eternally, that he gave up Jesus, he one and only Son, so that whoever-- anyone, everyone, without any exceptions-- who believes in Jesus our Savior will not ever perish or be lost to unbelief or punishment forever in hell, but will certainly have eternal, everlasting, and unending life in heaven. Amen.