

The image features the text "JOHN 3:16" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with the word "illustrated" written below it in a smaller, elegant cursive script. The text is set against a light gray background that depicts a forest of evergreen trees. The trees are rendered in a soft, painterly style, with some appearing as dark silhouettes and others as lighter, more detailed shapes. The overall composition is centered and has a clean, minimalist aesthetic.

**JOHN 3:16**  
*illustrated*

**For God so loved the world that He gave  
His only begotten Son, that whoever  
believes in Him should not perish but have  
everlasting life.                      John 3:16**

For many people John 3:16 is their favorite verse in the Bible. It owes its familiarity and appreciation to the fact that it is a short, simple declaration from God full of great news. And who doesn't like to receive good news?

The good news from God is pointed straight toward you no matter who you are. The message is easy to grasp. It starts with God and it ends with eternal life; which is exactly how we will break it down and illustrate it.

We will walk through the verse in four parts. The first part is about God. The second part reveals what He has done for us. The third deals with our response to what He has done. And finally, the fourth part details the awesome results that occur when you respond to Him.

God has made you a promise. There is no better topic to examine than this promise.

So let's begin!

**For God** so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

### ***For God...***

When talking about spiritual realities, the place to start is with God. And one of the most important things to know about God is that He is holy.

*...For the Lord our God is holy. (Psalm. 99:9)*

Holiness can be illustrated by light in which God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. To be holy means being perfectly pure and having no blemish. It also involves being unique or set apart. God is both unique and pure because He is set apart from all evil.

Holiness also involves being righteous and just. God loves what is right and demands rightness. When rightness observes evil it triggers a sense of indignation or anger. God has a righteous anger towards evil, and because He is just, consequences occur.

To help us better understand His rightness God gave 10 commandments. These commandments not only show us God's holiness, they also show us something about ourselves. Put simply, we are not perfect and do not measure up to His holiness. To be perfect means you have satisfied a righteous standard.

For example, the commandments tell us that we are not to lie—not ever. We are not to steal—anything. We are not to lust in our hearts. We are not to dishonor our parents. Because God is holy, we are not to take His name in vain. These commandments serve as a mirror. They reveal that we have violated His standards—repeatedly.

Moral perfection is required to enter God's holy presence. And all of us have failed. This failure is called sin.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*  
(Romans 3:23)

We have all lost our moral purity and have no means to get it back. Like a red wine stain on a white shirt, sin has left a permanent mark on our lives. We cannot get back to perfection.

God's commandments also reveal the qualities that make for good relationships, qualities like honesty, integrity, and respect. Because God is holy, He is deeply uncomfortable with even the smallest sins—they are just as repulsive to Him as some horrible crime would be to you. This leads God to separate from those who are guilty—which is all of us. A natural barrier stands between what is clean and what is unclean.

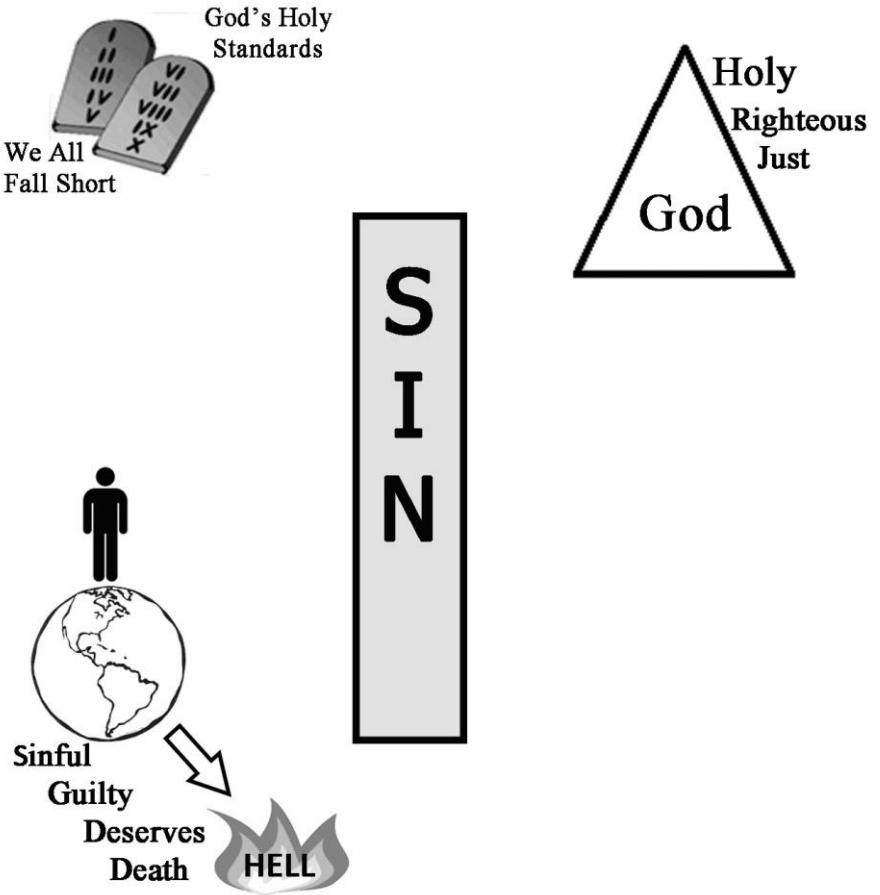
*Your iniquities have separated you from your God.*  
(Isaiah 59:2)

God's justice demands a consequence to fall upon all guilty offenders. God has always made it clear to us that the consequence for sin is death. Death means separation. All sinners, meaning everybody, deserve to be separated from God, both relationally and judicially.

*For the wages of sin is death.* (Romans 6:23a)

Apart from some remedy, this separation will last forever in a place called Hell. This certainly does not sound like good news. Just wait, it gets a whole lot better! But in order for us to appreciate the good news it is necessary to understand this bad news. After all, we typically will not embrace a remedy unless we first see that there is a problem.

Here is a visual for what we have seen so far:



**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

***so loved the world...***

We, as the guilty party, are not in a position to fix this problem of separation from God. But God is. And He did. The remedy starts in the heart of God where inexplicably we see His great love toward us. God says He loves the world which means He loves you, not in some impersonal way (“God loves all the trees and puppies and you too”), but in an intensely personal and unconditional way. His love for you is specific and very real.

We all know that love can often be phony and be expressed with empty words. Real love is demonstrated with actions. The good news is that God’s love for you has already been clearly demonstrated, proving that God loves you as you are, not as you should be.

***that He gave His only begotten Son...***

The demonstration of God’s love is connected to Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Jesus came from the holy and perfect side of the barrier and entered into our fallen and unholy world. He lived an amazing life, teaching thousands about God, demonstrating great compassion, healing people, and performing miracles. But it is not His life that tells His story. It is His death.

You see, Jesus, falsely accused, was willing to die on a cross as if He was a guilty criminal or sinner. But He wasn’t. You and I are the guilty ones, the sinners. While on that cross, God chose to pour out on His Son all the wrath that we deserve as guilty sinners.

It is as if you were standing on a railroad track completely unaware of a speeding train about to hit you. At the last moment Jesus pushes you to safety while He Himself absorbs the hit. The train? That was God's righteous anger heading straight toward you because of your offensive sin.

Jesus acted as your substitute. He absorbed God's wrath that was supposed to have landed on you. Sin has bankrupted you before God leaving you in need of someone else to pay your debt. As substitutes go, Jesus is the only valid option you have. You see, to have your sins successfully paid by another, that person needs to be holy, without any sin, and without any guilt. This means you need to find a perfect and sinless person and get them to willingly trade their perfection for your sin and death. Hopeless as this appears, there is one person who is both qualified *and* willing to make that trade and you don't have to find him, He has already found you!

Why was a perfect God willing to die for imperfect and undeserving sinners? Because He loves us. And by doing so, it was the remarkable demonstration of His love.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*  
(Romans 5:8)

Just before Jesus died on the cross He said, "It is finished," which carries the idea of "paid in full." It is as if He wrote a check on your behalf when He gave up His life. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus died on your behalf.

After His death Jesus was buried. Three days later He miraculously resurrected from the dead. God intended this resurrection to serve as notice to the world that He has accepted the substitutionary payment Jesus made for all humanity and that His justice is forever satisfied against all sin. The check Jesus wrote has cleared! The legal claim against you

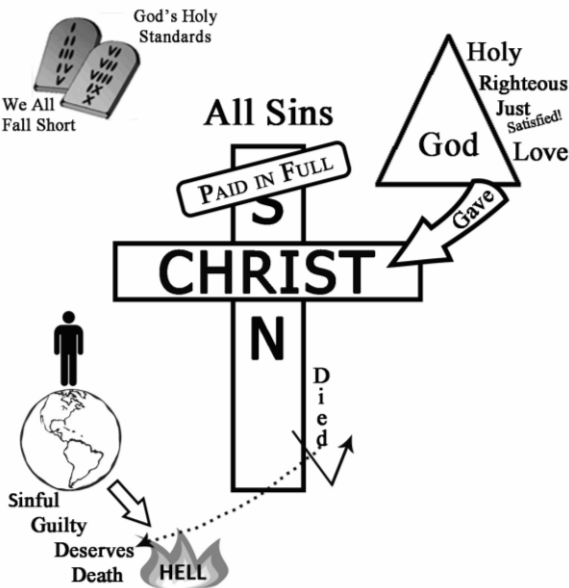
and your sin has been officially settled. This is not true for a few, it is true for everyone:

*But we see Jesus . . . that He, by the grace of God might taste death for everyone.” (Hebrews 2:9)*

Forty days later Jesus Christ ascended back into Heaven and the holy side of the barrier. The good news is that He has paved the way for all of us to cross over as well. The significance of His story centers on His death and resurrection. His story is often called “the gospel,” meaning “good news,” a message summed up in the following verses:

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*  
(1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

The cross is the action that demonstrates God’s love. The next time you see a cross may it remind you that God loves you so much that He would rather die than be without you.





For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life.

***that whoever believes in Him...***

So how is it that we can be with Him? The answer starts with God who, because of His love, chose to send His Son into our world. The answer continues with the Lord Jesus who chose, through His death, to break down the barrier between us and God and pave the way that brings us to God. And now the answer finishes with you and me and whether we choose to believe in Him, this Jesus who gave Himself for us.

A major strength of a relationship lies in the choice. When two people get married, they voluntarily choose to do so and that choice brings meaning to their connection. Love will respect another's choice. God loves you and with His love He appeals to you but He does not force; God's love invites.

God allows each one of us to decide which payment plan we prefer with regards to our sin. Will you claim the full payment that Jesus has already made for you? Or will you choose to make your own payments that involve eternal separation from God?

The way you claim Jesus' completed payment made on your behalf is to simply believe. Your faith is the one condition God requires—it is how you cash the check. Faith means to be persuaded so as to trust. God has demonstrated His love to you by giving His Son. Hopefully, you become persuaded that Jesus has died for you and that He has successfully paid your sin debt. Then you personally trust in Him, understanding that He is the remedy for your problem. He is the one that brings you to God.

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).*

Faith alone in Jesus Christ is the one, simple condition. God's plan is simple and free because its foundation is grace.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Grace means undeserved favor. If something is by grace, then it is totally, 100-percent unearned. Our salvation from being separated from God forever is by grace, and it is received only through faith. Faith in what? Faith in what Jesus did for you.

The verse goes on to spell out two things that you should not put your faith or confidence in. These two things should never be trusted to help get across the barrier and into Heaven. What are they? The first one is "yourselves." You are the problem. God is the remedy. When a person is drowning in the water they do not trust themselves. They yell, "Help!" When you lose your moral purity there is nothing you can do to regain it. We are defiled which is why Isaiah says:

*But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6)*

The second thing you should never rely on to get into Heaven is your works. These works include your good moral decisions and all the nice things you have done to help others. They also include works that occur in a church such as giving money, various rituals, baptism, saying a prayer, making commitments to God, or coming forward. Faith in Jesus means you have let go of everything that you once thought would help you gain entrance into Heaven and have grabbed hold of Jesus alone. He brings you to God.

These two things (“works” and “yourselves”) will never help you get into Heaven because if they did, they would give you a reason to boast. And boasting in what you have done runs contrary to grace. Remember, because you are guilty, you will never deserve eternal life. It is always by grace and it will always depend on what Jesus did, not what you do.

In light of this, one might ask, “But isn’t faith a work?” The answer is no. Faith is trusting in Another’s work which was done on your behalf. There is no work you can add to improve the situation. As Jesus said, “It is finished.”

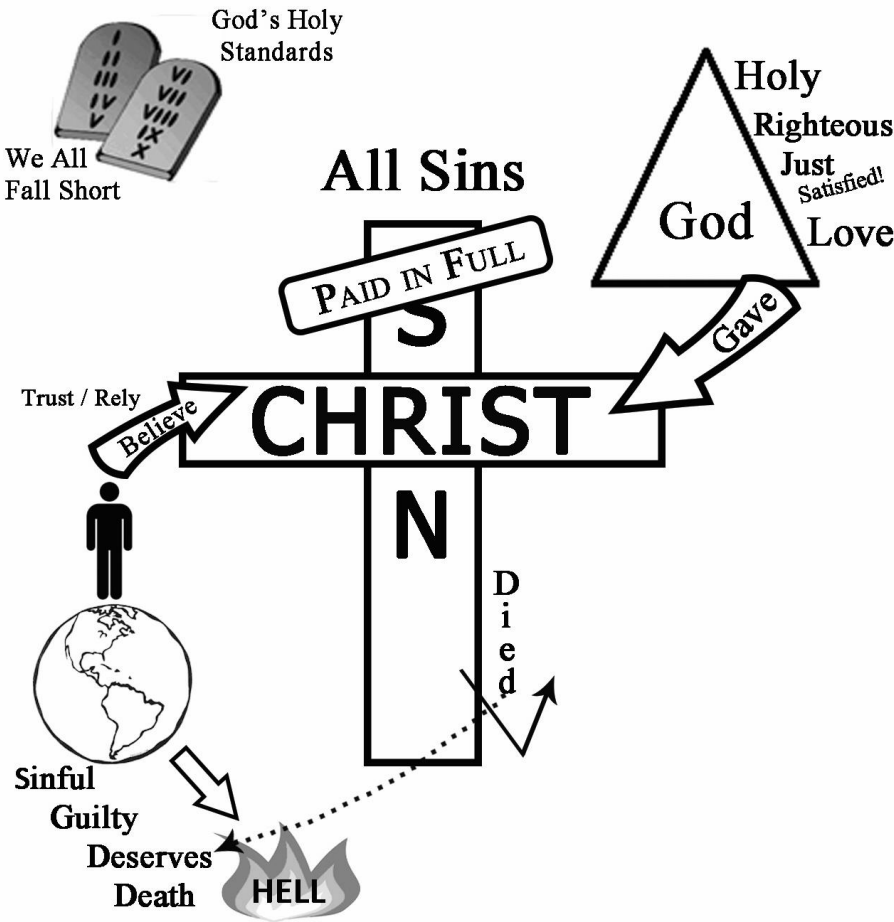
*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. (Romans 4:5)*

There is one more thing to point out in Ephesians 2:8-9. It says salvation “is the gift of God.” This is good news! A gift is free to the receiver though it cost the giver a price. A gift is unconditional and is never taken back. Once received, it is yours. God, based on the price paid by Jesus, is offering you a free gift called eternal life. It is yours for the taking! And once you take it, it is always and forever yours. But should you choose to never receive this gift please realize that grace rejected is grace forfeited.

A true gift comes with no strings attached. Once you receive it, it is yours no matter what you do with it. Imagine someone gave you the latest smartphone as a free gift. What can you do with a smartphone? You can text, email, take pictures, take videos, listen to music, look at maps, surf the internet, use social media sites, make voice recordings, use tons of different apps, and oh yeah, even use it for phone calls! But what if you take it home and put it under a table leg to level the table? Is it still your phone? Yes. It is yours to keep. But are you enjoying all the benefits of the phone? No. You are missing out on some good things. But the phone remains yours. It was a gift. How you are using it may not make sense, but it is still yours.

This is what God says salvation and having eternal life is like. Possessing eternal life has great benefits and an awesome upside potential. The life is always yours. If you do not take advantage of its potential, it is to your disadvantage. You will not enjoy the intended benefits, but the gift (eternal life) remains yours.

The diagram below illustrates our verse and what we have seen thus far.



For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **should not perish but have everlasting life.**

*should not perish but have everlasting life.*

God made a tremendous promise to the world in John 3:16. We saw the basis of the promise: He gave His only Son. We saw the condition to receive the promise: belief in His Son. But what did He actually promise?

God has promised you two things. The first is that you will not perish, and the second is that you will have everlasting life. The resurrected Jesus is alive and the giver of eternal life.

To be separated from God for all eternity would be to perish. This was never God's intention, which explains why He paid such a price to rescue you. It also shows how greatly He values you.

God's promise that you will never perish is the remedy that you so desperately need. A promise is giving a guarantee which means God's integrity is on the line. Because God is holy, His promise is guaranteed! The verse continues by saying that when you believe you will have everlasting life. You do not receive this in the future, like after you die, but you have it in the present, like right now. And how long does eternal life last? Forever! This new life can be your possession today, tomorrow, and for all eternity.

This means that you can know, with certainty, right now, that you have risk free, guaranteed eternal life. God wants you to know this.

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)*

It is clear that God wants you to know for sure that you have eternal life. In order to be sure, it must be secure. The reality is that you can never lose this new life. If there was something you could do to lose it, then the verse we just read could never be true because there would always be the possibility that you might do something to jeopardize it.

However, by its very nature, this life is eternal. You cannot have eternal life for three years and then no longer have it because then it would be “three years life”, not “eternal life.” Furthermore, God has promised anyone who believes in the Son of God that they will never perish. If you could lose your salvation, then you would perish, and God’s promise would be a lie.

We saw that salvation is said to be a gift, and gifts are not taken back. If a gift is yanked back because of bad behavior, then it really wasn’t a gift at all, but rather it was a reward for good behavior. If the gift of salvation was taken back because of bad behavior then it is as if God is saying that you can keep your eternal life but only if you earned it. But that would be a condition of works and directly contradict grace. The good news is that the gift will never be taken back. It is yours forever!

We saw that salvation is said to be by grace which means it can never be earned. It is never based on your performance or works. It is based on Christ’s performance and His work. This is why He receives all the glory. Your possession of eternal life cannot be jeopardized by your sins. Jesus has already died for your sins, even future ones. Remember, “It is finished.” God has laid all your sins upon Jesus, and He says the case is closed. Future sins cannot condemn you. Can you see why this is called good news?

In this next verse notice the guarantee of Jesus:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24)*

Jesus is restating the promise of John 3:16 with different wording. As you read the verse ask yourself: Have you heard God's words? Have you been persuaded so as to believe in Jesus whom God sent? If so, what will you not come into in the future? And what has already happened in the present?

If you have believed, you will not come into future judgment and you have already passed from death into life. You have crossed over the barrier, and you will never go back! Your eternal destiny has changed. Jesus declares this as fact, something that has already happened, something you know to be true, something you can stand upon. How did this occur? By faith.

If you have believed, you have been born again and have a new identity and status as a child of God.

*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)*

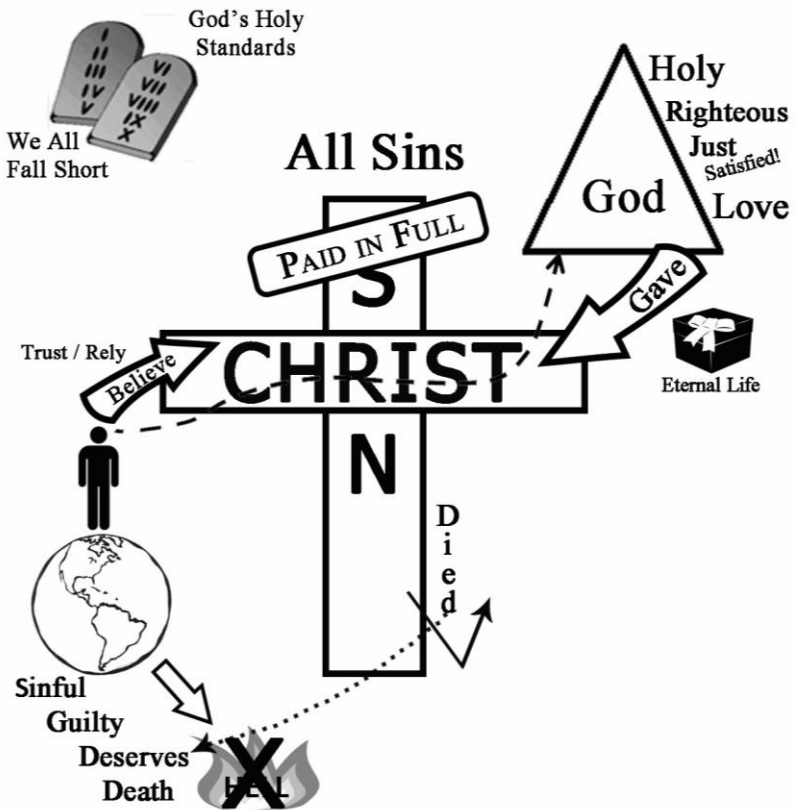
If you have believed, what a precious reality to know for sure that you have, right now, eternal life and will one day go to Heaven. You don't deserve it, but through Jesus you possess it. God is not mad at you nor are you under His wrath. Instead you are now His child and possess His life. You may be a faithful child or a rebellious child who will be corrected, but you are a child of God today, tomorrow, and forever.

Imagine the difference knowing this can make in your daily life. You can be motivated by love and your secure relationship

with God instead of by fear. You have the assurance of belonging instead of ever wondering. You are no longer separated, but together. You are known and loved. This is how God wants you to live!

John 3:16 starts with God and ends with eternal life. We trust you have received this life and possess it today. That indeed would be good news!

Thanks for reading.



By Kurt Witzig,  
Copyright 2015, Grace Gospel Press