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THIS TEACHING LETTER BY DR. KEN BOA IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS DONATIONS OF OUR PARTNERS.

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WRATH THAT REMAINS

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

In seminary, budding preachers are taught to find the "big idea" of a biblical passage and develop their sermon around it. The theory is that every speaker has a controlling thought or theme that serves as a summary of what he or she is saying. To discover that "big idea"—whether in a sermon or a sentence—is to discover the heart of the speaker's purpose.

Many have suggested that John 3:16 is the "big idea" of the Bible. Although it is perhaps the best-known verse in all of Scripture, it actually gives us only half the story. It presents the good news that God loves the human race so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as a Savior from sin for all who would believe in Him. But there is another side of the gospel message that is missing from this famous verse: What happens to those who don't believe? While it is hinted at in John 3:16 ("perish"), another verse, John 3:36, balances both sides of the gospel message better than perhaps any other verse in the Bible.

From Genesis to Revelation, the stark truth of Scripture is that God's wrath rests on evil and on those who practice it. From the day God cursed Cain, the first murderer (Gen. 4:11), to the future day when the promise of the New Jerusalem is fully realized (Rev. 21:27), God's wrath against evil is complete and without exception.

John 3:36 adds the balancing reality that "he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Because God's nature

is righteous and pure, His wrath—His righteous revulsion toward anything that detracts from His glory—is ongoing. Therefore, His wrath "remains" unless it is removed. And the good news of the gospel is that God's wrath was turned toward Jesus instead of us. But we must remember that His wrath remains on any who reject His gift of Jesus.

Preachers like to say that it's the bad news that makes the good news good. And they're right. If we are Christians, perhaps our next prayer could be a word of thanks to God that His wrath no longer remains on us.

God's Promise:
 God's wrath against sinners is permanent—except for those who believe.

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REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart

RECIPIENTS OF HIS BOUNDLESS GRACE

Lord, give me the illumination to see You more as You are, rather than what I fancy You to be. I realize that all the stories in the pages of Your revealed Word point to You, Your character, Your ways, Your faithfulness, Your goodness, Your graciousness, Your patience, Your loyal love, Your creative purposes, and the excellence of Your glorious attributes. Everything is about You and not us, yet You have chosen to make us the recipients of Your boundless grace. May I know You, and may I know myself in light of the knowledge of You. Your progressive revelation of Your person, powers, and perfections illuminates my path and inspires me to walk in fidelity and obedience to You, and I ask for the empowerment by Your Holy Spirit to be fully obedient to all that You call me to be and do.

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Psalm 16—“In Your Presence Is Fullness of Joy”

The Lord Is Our Highest Good

Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in You. (Ps. 16:1)

David evidently wrote Psalm 16 when he was a refugee driven from the land of Israel and pursued by Saul and his men like a flea on a dog's back. They sought to deprive him of his inheritance from the Lord, saying, “Go, serve other gods” (1 Sam. 26:19). In Psalm 16, David affirms his single-minded commitment to the Lord and his rejection of anything opposed to God.

We who have committed our lives to Christ are also refugees, for we have turned to the Lord for refuge in a world that would deprive us of enjoying our spiritual inheritance by luring us to serve the gods of money, sex, and power. Like David, we must cultivate the single-minded attitude of looking to God alone for our security, significance, and satisfaction. We must rest in the Lord and

regard Him as our highest good: “I said to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good besides You’” (Ps. 16:2; cf. 73:25).

The Lord Is Our Inheritance

David cherishes fellowship with people of character and holiness (Ps. 16:3) and contrasts “the sorrows of those who have bartered for another god” (v. 4) with the blessings of those whose sole hope of inheritance rests in the Lord. “The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me” (vv. 5–6).

When the promised land was distributed among the tribes of Israel, the Levitical priests were given no tract of land. The Lord told them, “You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel” (Num. 18:20).

As believers in Christ, our abundance and security rests in Him and not in our earthly possessions. We must not make the mistake of putting our hope in savings, investments, and material goods. “For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens” (Prov. 23:5). When we recognize that God alone is our portion and our inheritance, we will look beyond our earthly means of provision to Him as our true Source of provision. And when we discover that the world's treasures and plaudits are as nothing compared to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7–11), we will be content with God's level of material provision because of the beauty and richness of our spiritual heritage.

David portrays this spiritual heritage in terms of two present benefits and two future prospects.

Two Present Benefits

1. *God guides and counsels us.* “I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night” (Ps. 16:7). The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to guide, reprove, and

teach the child of God. Life is too complex and uncertain to discern the best paths on our own. One of the great benefits of regular time in the Scriptures is the matchless counsel we can discover in its precepts and principles.

2. *God gives us an assurance that transcends our circumstances.* “I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely” (Ps. 16:8–9). The more we practice His presence in the many situations we encounter, the more personal and real He becomes in our lives. We discover that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13) and that we are never alone in any circumstance we face.

Two Future Prospects

1. *The security we have in Christ extends not only throughout our earthly sojourn, but also beyond this life.* “For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay” (Ps. 16:10). Peter and Paul both

quoted this passage as a Messianic prophecy. David “looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:27–31; 13:35–37), whose body, unlike David's, did not undergo decay. Our sure confidence is that death will be swallowed up in the victory of our resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51–58).

2. *We will have complete satisfaction and endless joys in the loving presence of the living God.* “You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Ps. 16:11). Our inheritance in Christ is beyond all imagination (1 Cor. 2:9), and the greatest pleasure we have known on this planet is but a faint shadow of the kindnesses He will bestow forever on those who have put their hope in Him. As Thomas Aquinas put it, “In the perfect happiness of heaven nothing more will remain to be desired; in the full enjoyment of God man will obtain whatever he has desired in other things.”

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