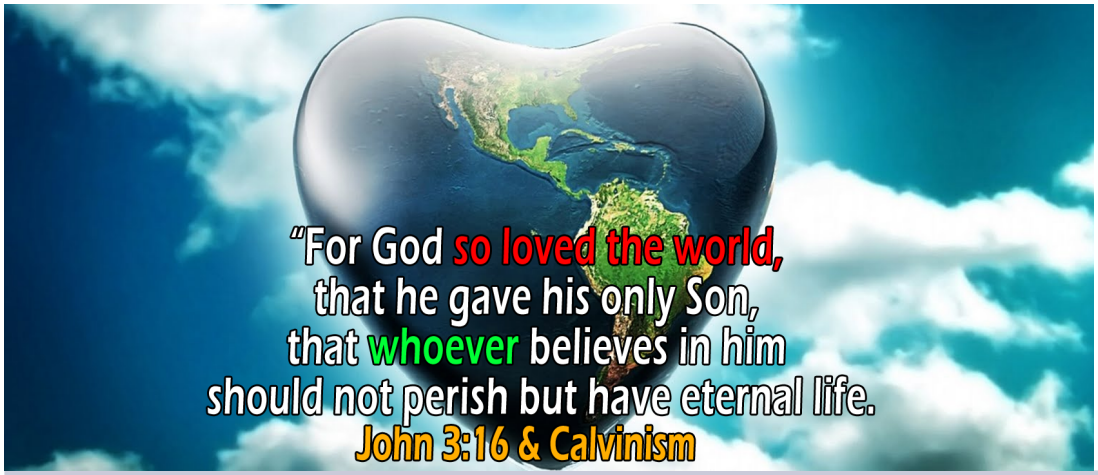
John 3:16, 'God so loved the world'

Published: Friday 25th of April 2014 17:19 by Simon Wartanian
URL: https://www.thecalvinist.net/post/John-3:16-God-So-Loved-The-World



> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that **whoever believes in him** may have eternal life." 16 "For God so loved **the world**, that he gave his only Son, that **whoever believes in him** should not perish but have eternal life. (ESV)

(For a better and more recent defense see here.)

"The Gospel in a single verse," that is what many have called John 3:16. Surely it is one of the most known verses from Scripture, if not the most known. But the contextual meaning of it now has been lost. Nowadays Jn 3:16 is used to imply that God loves everyone so very much and gives everyone a choice to believe in Him. I, for one thought that Jn 3:16 was something that John wrote, not something Jesus said in a conversation with Nicodemus! Although that is still debated and not 100% clear. So let us examine Jn 3:16 within its context.

First thing to remember is that this is a conversation between the Lord Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus liked Jesus' teachings and came to Him in the night to talk to him and ask Him questions. Jesus in verse 3 gives Him the famous "You must be born again" answer.

Now we need to examine the meaning of the word "**world**" in this context. The Lord tells Nicodemus that God has a special love for the "**world,**" it seems to me that it's talking about redemptive love, not just general love that God has for every human being. What does this mean? The Greek word for "world" is kosmos (**κόσμος**, G2888). This is a very interesting word. Let's see what the **Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew and Greek Definitions**[1] says about this word:

- - Original: **κόσμος**
- - Transliteration: **Kosmos**
- - Phonetic: **kos'-mos**
- - Definition:
- 1. an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, government
- 2. ornament, decoration, adornment, i.e. the arrangement of the stars, 'the heavenly hosts', as the ornament of the heavens. 1 Pet. 3:
- 3. the world, the universe
- 4. the circle of the earth, the earth
- 5. the inhabitants of the earth, men, the human family
- 6. the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ
- 7. world affairs, the aggregate of things earthly

- a. the whole circle of earthly goods, endowments riches, advantages, pleasures, etc, which although hollow and frail and fleeting, stir desire, seduce from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ
- 8. any aggregate or general collection of particulars of any sort
    - a. the Gentiles as contrasted to the Jews (Rom. 11:12 etc)
    - b. of believers only, John 1:29; 3:16; 3:17; 6:33; 12:47 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 5:19
- - Origin: probably from the base of G2865
- - TDNT entry: 17:28,5
- - Part(s) of speech: Noun Masculine

Does it really say that God loves every single person in the world equally or in the same way? I doubt it, seeing passages for example in the Psalms which speak about God having a hatred (5:5; 11:5), of course this is not the same sinful hatred that we humans have. Now I believe that God loves everyone, but doesn't love everyone in a ***redemptive love*** sense. Nicodemus, being a "ruler of the Jews" knew that God loves Israel, or at least those Jews who serve God and do His commandments. They should know that because it is written that God redeemed them from Egypt because He loved them (Duet 7:7-8). What was a new revelation for him is that God had a love for the "**world.**" Mostly the word 'world' is used in a negative sense or in reference to the Gentiles (e.g. Jn 12:19; 17:9). Thus Jesus was saying to Nicodemus that God loves even non-Israelite! The word 'world' is used in many senses especially in John, the context decides what the word means.

Another thing to note is the phrase **"For God so loved the world."** This "so" does not indicate the measure of love, but the way, the manner of love, that's why the alternate reading for the ESV says "This is how God loved the world."

The next to examine is the phrase "**whoever believes in him."** Which is the phrase most emphasized from the verse and also mentioned in verse 15 which I really have no problem with. Since "none seeks after God" (Rom 3:9-12), unless God draws them (Jn 6:44) and the offer of salvation is universal to every single individual who hears the Gospel (Mt 22:14). The funny thing is, in the Greek text there is no such thing as "whosoever will." The Greek phrase **πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων** (pas ha pusteuon) literally translates "**all the believing**" or "**everyone believing."** Bible-believing Christians believe that those who have repented toward God and have put their faith in Christ are saved. All the believing will definitely not perish, but those who do not believe are already condemned (verse 18)!

The interesting thing is that Jn 3:16 does support "Limited Atonement" since it says that "whoever believes in him will not perish," and we see in verse 18 that whoever doesn't believe is already condemned! Thus Christ couldn't have paid their ransom and they still had to pay for their sins in Hell. It would be unjust for God to punish Christ for their sins and then punish them again in the eternal lake of fire.

Now let's consider some commentaries.

The **ESV Study Bible** explains:[2]

> 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.

John Gill said about John 3:16: **[3]**

> **For God so loved the world**,....The Persic version reads "men": but not every man in the world is here meant, or all the individuals of human nature; for all are not the objects of God's special love, which is here designed, as appears from the instance and evidence of it, the gift of his Son: nor is Christ God's gift to every one; for to whomsoever he gives his Son, he gives all things freely with him; which is not the case of every man. Nor is human nature here

intended, in opposition to, and distinction from, the angelic nature; for though God has showed a regard to fallen men, and not to fallen angels, and has provided a Saviour for the one, and not for the other; and Christ has assumed the nature of men, and not angels; yet not for the sake of all men, but the spiritual seed of Abraham; and besides, it will not be easily proved, that human nature is ever called the world: nor is the whole body of the chosen ones, as consisting of Jews and Gentiles, here designed; for though these are called the world, Joh 6:33; and are the objects of God's special love, and to them Christ is given, and they are brought to believe in him, and shall never perish, but shall be saved with an everlasting salvation; yet rather the Gentiles particularly, and God's elect among them, are meant; who are often called "the world", and "the whole world", and "the nations of the world", as distinct from the Jews; see Ro 11:12, compared with Mt 6:32. The Jews had the same distinction we have now, the church and the world; the former they took to themselves, and the latter they gave to all the nations around: hence we often meet with this distinction, Israel, and the nations of the world; on those words,

""let them bring forth their witness", that they may be justified, Isa 43:9 (say {b} the doctors) these are Israel; "or let them hear and say it is truth", these are "the nations of the world".''

And again {c},

- "the holy, blessed God said to Israel, when I judge Israel, I do not judge them as "the nations of the world":''
- and so in a multitude of places: and it should be observed, that our Lord was now discoursing with a Jewish Rabbi, and that he is opposing a commonly received notion of theirs, that when the Messiah came, the Gentiles should have no benefit or advantage by him, only the Israelites; so far should they be from it, that, according to their sense, the most dreadful judgments, calamities, and curses, should befall them; yea, hell and eternal damnation. "
- There is a place (they say {d},) the name of which is "Hadrach", Zec 9:1. This is the King Messiah, who is, □□ □□□, "sharp and tender"; sharp to "the nations", and tender to "Israel".''
- And so of the "sun of righteousness", in Mal 4:2, they say {e},
- "there is healing for the Israelites in it: but the idolatrous nations shall be burnt by it.''

And that {f}

- "there is mercy for Israel, but judgment for the rest of the nations.''
- And on those words in Isa 21:12, "the morning cometh", and also the night, they observe {g},
- "the morning is for the righteous, and the night for the wicked; the morning is for Israel, and the night for "the nations of the world".''

And again {h},

- "in the time to come, (the times of the Messiah,) the holy, blessed God will bring "darkness" upon "the nations", and will enlighten Israel, as it is said, Isa 60:2.''

Once more {i},

- "in the time to come, the holy, blessed God will bring the nations of the world, and will cast them into the midst of hell under the Israelites, as it is said, Isa 43:3.''
- To which may be added that denunciation of theirs {k}
- "woe to the nations of the world, who perish, and they know not that they perish: in the time that the sanctuary was standing, the altar atoned for them; but now who shall atone for them?''
- Now, in opposition to such a notion, our Lord addresses this Jew; and it is as if he had said, you Rabbis say, that when the Messiah comes, only the Israelites, the peculiar favourites of God, shall share in the blessings that come by, and with him; and that the Gentiles shall reap no advantage by him, being hated of God, and rejected of him: but I tell you, God has so loved the Gentiles, as well as the Jews,
- **that he gave his only begotten Son**; to, and for them, as well as for the Jews; to be a covenant of the people, the Gentiles, the Saviour of them, and a sacrifice for them; a gift which is a sufficient evidence of his love to them; it being a large and comprehensive one, an irreversible and unspeakable one; no other than his own Son by nature, of the same essence, perfections, and glory with him; begotten by him in a way inconceivable and

expressible by mortals; and his only begotten one; the object of his love and delight, and in whom he is ever well pleased; and yet, such is his love to the Gentiles, as well as Jews, that he has given him, in human nature, up, into the hands of men, and of justice, and to death itself:

- **that whosoever believeth in him,** whether Jew or Gentile,
- **should not perish,** but have everlasting life; [See comments on Joh 3:15].

This content is taken from this document.

[1] Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew and Greek Definitions. Taken from the Bible software The Word. See "Resources."

[2] ESV Study Bible, 2008 (Crossway). Taken from the Online Version at www.esvbible.org

[3] John Gill, Exposition of the Entire Bible on John 3:16. Taken from the Bible software The Word. See "Resources."