

God Loves the World, Indeed?

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KJV is the 1769 edition of the *King James Version*

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Having bounced around the world for about six decades it has become clear to me that many folks in the world question whether or not God actually does love the world. Many of these same earthly residents have also heard or read John 3:16 in which the declaration, "...God so loved the world that He gave..." has been prominently declared for nearly 2,000 years. They have also heard that "God is love". This God is proclaimed as being that same God Who is the God of the Christian religion, as well as the God of the Jewish faith. This same God is that God of the Holy Bible, the Creator according to the Bible.

Dwellers upon the planet know about this God Who so loved this world. Some also have a clear conception of various expressions which love may convene upon its object(s). Herein lies the questioning. As one looks around the world one must surely see corruption, vanity, death, sorrows, suffering, chaos, wars, tragedies, hatred, fear and a general lack of peace. One sees animals starving, children abandoned, greed unchecked, utterly terrible violence and the worldwide abuse of power. These observers will note the vanity of seeing parents struggle to provide for their child, educate him and watch him grow—and then to stand beside his grave when he reaches the ripe age of 22, the victim of a drunk driver or other mindless act. Why the struggle? Does not this God see the loss, the pain the sorrow? If God loves the world why are so many animals nearing extinction? Why does a Hitler rule and cause such suffering, why the destruction of a tsunami upon apparently innocent poor peoples? Why are some diners at a nice restaurant in Jerusalem suddenly punctured with nails from a suicidal terrorist? Why would this God allow a Lincoln or a John Kennedy to be murdered? These and many more questions and observations would appear to induce any

earthly resident to wonder about the love of God. Or, indeed, if even such a God exists. From such suppositions it is not difficult to declare that the God of the Bible either:

(1) Does not exist

or,

(2) Does not love the world, and that therefore the Bible and or John 3:16 is not to be trusted.

The above two conclusions *seem* to be apparently valid. One does not need an astronomical IQ to come to the above conclusions when comparing John 3:16 and I John 4:8 to the everyday realities seen in the world! Hence the two propositions are sustainable, but they are not the only potential conclusions. So how can I (this writer) expect to reach others with the good news about salvation and election, if my God and His Word lack even the slightest credibility?

When trying to reach out to those around me, I have often encountered the hurried conclusions as shown above. I (we) must first clarify John 3:16, before we can expect hearers to accept any more of our God's Words! Thus the impetus for this brief essay.

How would you answer those who doubt that God loves the world? I have heard several replies; most refer to the unfolding of God's plan (or, dispensations) as moving right along per the Biblical design which is also sharply visible in the historical record of mankind. Other replies stress the necessity of evil existing so as to manifest God's love, kind of a yin-yang balancing act. Such replies may well be true, but are often too involved or theologically arcane to communicate to those who doubt the love of God or of the veracity of the Holy Writ. I shall reply focusing upon the text of John 3:16 and its context. I shall attempt to keep-it-simple.

There are two key words in John 3:16, as regards this essay. One is "love" and the other is "world". Let us examine these terms a bit closer.

On Love

Love is the Greek - *agape/agapao* (αγαπω a verb). It is not eros (ερως), or erotic love. Eros reflects the lustful dog-in-heat type of lust. Nor is it that type of love as seen in the English texts of Matthew 10:37...

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [per the KJV]

or John 15:19

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. [per the KJV]

in both passages "love" is from the verb *phileo* (φιλεω). This type of love is that which is related to friendship, to family and brotherly (Philadelphia) love. It is a good type of love, but it is not that unique love which comes from God. *Agape* love has its origins in God, it comes not from the world nor from any created creatures. It is eternal, and is well defined in the first few verses of I Corinthians chapter 13. When we read that "God is love" as in I John 4:7 and 8:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. [per KJV]

We note that the above "love" is *agape* love. I urge you to allow these two verses to gently soak into your consciousness, they are profound!

Agape love is only found in God's elect on earth. When a pagan attempts to express this type of love it is distorted or perverted as in John 3:19. God put this special love into the heart of every genuine saint wherein it may or may not be expressed. It is not a type of love which can be found otherwise, it is not properly found outside the body of believers (*i.e.* imitations of this love are always in some way, perverted). When an elected person tries to express this *agape* love to a pagan, it is not received nor understood nor appreciated. This love is a fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.
[Galatians 5:22,23 KJV]

Pausing for a moment upon this term *agape*, one might realize that this love is not grasped by pagans, nor is it fully intended for the enemies of God. For to them this type of love is not understood or existing, pagan mentality is completely contrary to God, to truth, to good. It is this love which John 3:16 puts forth as that via which God *loved* the world. Clearly if this love is foreign to pagans, why then does God express it to pagans? Or why do we read that the believers in the Millennium are to love their enemies?

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love [*agapao*] your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? [Matthew 5:43-47 per the KJV]

We love because of the unique nature of this special type of love. It is a testimony against those of this world. In a future judgment, they will be made to recall the acts of love offered to them, note Matthew 25:31-46,

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations [*i.e.* Gentiles]: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. [per the KJV]

The above acts of love will be remembered. Consequently when we read that God so loved the world....it could mean a love expressed to ALL those upon the earth or in the world. Pagans as well as the chosen or elect. In which case it is only *received* by the elect in the world. Thus, we may see a limiting aspect here! We can pose the question: "When it says that God so loved the world..." does it mean the world of pagans AND the world of the elect? If only one, then it must only mean the world of the elect. But, we cannot yet substantiate such a conclusion, we need more evidence, and the word "love" does not give us (or at least this writer) all that we need.

On World

"World" in John 3:16 is the Greek term *cosmos/cosmeo* (κοσμεω a verb). It is a common word, with a still uncertain etymology at this time.

Cosmos seems to have undergone somewhat of a change from its classical meaning to that as used in the New Testament. In classical Greek it typically meant *order* as at Matthew 25:7 [a verb form] or *adornment* as at I Peter 3:3, but generally in the New Testament is translated as "world".

Its monosemic meaning is hard to establish, as it has numerous connotations like our modern term "world". But I may suggest this as the typical New Testament meaning: *κοσμος* is an organized sphere which is contrary to God. "Adornment" can be subsumed under this definition if it is seen as the orderly preparations done to make a female more appealing in the eyes of the world. I should add that my definition applies to its usage seen in the New Testament, which is our current primary context.

In the New Testament the word *κοσμος* [noun form] is translated as:

world (184x), adornment (1x), world's (1x) each per NASB statistics

Hermann Sasse, in a great article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (volume III, s.v. *κοσμος*), provides us with a list of subjects which "come into" this sphere known as "world". Some are as follows:

every man (Jn 1:9), light (Jn 3:19), the prophet (Jn 6:14), the Christ (Jn 11:27), sin and death (Rev 5:12), false prophets (I Jn 4:1), seducers (II Jn 7). Subjects of "in the world" are: Logos (Jn 1:10), the disciples (Jn 13:1), the spirit of Antichrist (I Jn 4:3). *et al.*

The world is a planet, a realm or sphere. It can include the heavens as a synonym of universe, it can be the opposite of the spiritual; world is often material. There are occurrences in which "world" means the world of humans, as per John 12:19,

The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him. [per KJV]

Note, in the above quote, that despite the literal meaning, the entire world (as in the world of humans) did not follow after Jesus! In the New

Testament when the world is redeemed it ceases to be *κοσμος*. Keep this fact in mind, the redeemed world, or the millennial Kingdom of Christ is never referred to as the or a *cosmos*. We read also of a new heavens and earth, but not of a new *cosmos*. Note Revelation 11:15,

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. [per KJV]

In the above verse, Christ is establishing His authority over all the earth. It is never referred to again as any type of a *cosmos*! The King Jesus Christ will rule with a rod of iron. When a new heaven and earth are created, force is no longer needed.

Each use of the term for world (*κοσμος*) needs to be evaluated, notably the added meanings supplied by the contexts. World_a does not equal world_b. For example compare these usages as seen in the New Testament:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. John 3:16,17 [per the NASB]

I pray for them: I pray not for the world [*cosmos*], but for them which thou hast given me; John 17:9 [KJV]

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*. I John 2:2 [KJV]

Love not the world [*cosmos*], neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. I John 2:15,16 [KJV]

Alas! we have such clear contradictions! Indeed. In one passage we read that God loves the world; in another, He can pay for the sins of the whole world. Then we read that Jesus prays not for the world, and that saints are not to love the world else the love of the Father is NOT in them!

The Conclusion to the Matter

To resolve the apparent contradiction, the term for world in John 3:16 must mean the world (or sphere of) the elect. In John 17:9 the world must mean the world of the non-elect. If the elect obey and serve God, they are often blessed even here in the sphere of this world. When we sin God may "spank" us (as we are His children). However, the present world at large [not the souls of the elect], is under the rule of Satan, or the evil one:

Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. John 14:30 [KJV, note also II Corinthians 4:4]

Satan still controls this *cosmos*, (world) until the time of Revelation 11:15. Satan gained control when Adam chose to disobey God, and the earth was cursed. That is why so much suffering occurs, why death and violence is so prevalent. God is exposing the real nature of evil, in a controlled way, we believers trust this is so, as suggested by the Biblical texts. Yes, God allows Satan to "rule" the planet for now. We must never forget that we elect are sealed with the indwelling Holy Spirit—protected—and that no accidents occur in our earthly lives, everything has a purpose and function, as designed. Once raptured up to our real home, we shall be eternally separated from those who actually love evil, from the many who actually hate God.

We believers are today in the sphere of the world, we are surrounded by this world, much as a boat is on the surface of the ocean. However, we are not *of* this world for:

"If the world [*cosmos*] hates you, you know that it has hated Me before {it hated} you. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose [*aorist*] you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. John 15:18,19 [per the NASB]

Not only are the disciples (as per the above quote) elected but each believer today is elect, or chosen from out of. "Chosen from out of" is a fair

definition of the Greek word for *church* (ἐκκλησία), usually a called-out group, covered by Christ's shed blood! Our citizenship is in heaven, on earth we are truly aliens! Though in/on the world today, we want to try to be like a sound boat on the water, we do not want the water in the boat. We should maintain a distinction!

So there you have it in a nutshell, why the term "world" in John 3:16 needs to be examined and compared with the other usages which John makes of the word. John's use of *agape* love also suggests that John 3:16 may not be fully intended for the world of pagans, but for the world of the elect. In each case, in which we find the Greek term for *cosmos*, we need to ascertain its context in order to determine the full meaning:

- (1) it may be the world as a planet, Matthew 13:35
- (2) it may be world as the world of humans as per John 17:21
- (3) it may world as in the Greek and Roman empires as per Romans 1:8
- (4) it may be world as in worldly wealth or possessions as per I John 3:17
- (5) it may be the world of unbelievers or pagans or Gentiles as per John 17:9, and Romans 11:15, et cetera.

As demonstrated, it is the various connotations of *cosmos*, "world" which cements the distinction and removes the apparent contradiction seen when John 3:16 is compared to other Biblical usages. Just as Noah was saved floating upon the flood-waters, so are we saved today from this "wicked and perverse generation", (Philippians 2:15) and it is amongst this present "wicked and perverse generation" that we are appearing [present tense] as

lights! We, the elect, are not of the darkness of this dark age—note Ephesians 5:8, 6:12 and I Thessalonians 5:4,5.

What a blessing to be elected, and what a blessing to know of our election! As such we *should* appear as lights. A separate people, loved and chosen by God, who exist as aliens, temporarily here in this world. For indeed, "God so loved the world (*i.e.* the elect!), that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." [NASB] Pagans and this *cosmos* will perish, as in the days of Noah, but the chosen will be rescued (saved) and continue to experience God's *agape* love—eternally, so it was written.