

## THE “LOVE,” “WORLD” AND “WHOSOEVER” OF JOHN 3:16

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John 3:1-21

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” I John 3:1

The message of Scripture, briefly put, is that man sinned, thereby incurring divine wrath and thoroughly corrupting his nature; that he does not seek God and cannot please God, but rebels against Him; that God chose to save a host that no man can number out of corrupt humanity; that before the world began He gave these to Christ for this purpose, and that by His crucifixion, Christ received their judgment in His body, took away their sin and all of its consequences, and gives to them His own righteousness and everlasting life.

(Genesis 3; Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 64:6, 7; Romans 3:9-18; Psalm 65:4; John 6:37-40; 10:11-18; 15:16, 19; 17:1-9; Ephesians 1:3-6; Romans 8:28-34; Acts 13:48; II Thessalonians 2:13, 14; I Peter 1:2; 2:9; Isaiah 53; I Corinthians 15:1-3; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 2:21-25)

Because man is corrupted by sin, he rebels against this message, often perverting Scripture to oppose it. He assumes he can earn God’s approval, refusing to acknowledge or comprehend his thorough corruption. In some, this rebellion proposes works and/or rituals to win God’s favor. Others explain simple faith as the one good deed that win’s God’s approval. The best known verse in Scripture, John 3:16, is used often to defend this idea. But such use fails to examine the biblical terms used in the text. Thus, this message examines the “love,” the “world” and the “whosoever” of John 3:16, to see what their meanings are in Scripture.

**I. What is “love” in John 3:16?** Many misconstrue this to be an enlarged version of the human emotion that we call “love.” But this projects human love upon God when, in fact, the opposite is reality: love in man is a manifestation of God’s image in which man was created. But that image of God in man is disfigured by sin’s curse, so that human and divine love are more contrasted than they are comparable.

**A. God’s love is always effectual;** it accomplishes its objective because it is inseparable from God’s omnipotence and omniscience. Man’s love is often ineffectual because it is nothing more than a human sentiment that has no power to control its object.

**B. God’s love is self-sacrificing,** as proclaimed in John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” But man’s love is selfish – we love because of the benefits we receive from the beloved.

**C. God’s love is everlasting;** human love fades. (Jeremiah 31:3)

**D. Human and divine love share this characteristic: Both are discriminating,** neither is directed universally or uniformly to every human being. Yet in this shared quality they differ,

inasmuch as man loves those who are lovable to him—those who have something that he desires. But God loves enemies, and rebels; those who are unlovable whom He will subdue and transform by His sovereign love.

(Psalm 5:5; 7:11-13; 11:5; Proverbs 6:16-19; Malachi 1:1-3; Romans 9:9-13; Hebrews 12:6-8; I John 3:1-2)

**II. What is the “world” in John 3:16?** Misconstrual of God’s love fuels misperception regarding the “world” in John 3:16. Thus it is assumed to mean every human being---past, present and future—upon earth. This assumption is not accurate, but can be corrected by accepting:

**A. The meaning of the Greek term for “world” (“kosmos”):** a general term used variously to describe the order, structure, system, etc., etc., of humanity. It refers to humanity, not as individuals, but as people groups distinguished nationally, ethnically, linguistically, etc., etc.

**B. The Divine disposition toward the wicked, shown throughout Scripture**

(Genesis 6-8, 19; Exodus 14; Psalm 7:11-13)

**C. The usage John and other biblical writers make of the term in other writings.**

(Romans 11:15; I John 3:1)

**D. The immediate context in which it is used:** Christ is speaking to a Jewish ruler.

**III. Who is “whosoever” of John 3:16?** Again, the generality with which “love” and “world” have often been misconstrued has affected the understanding of “whosoever.” Like the term “world,” it is construed to mean every human being, past, present and future. Contrary to this, the text of Scripture limits the meaning to one group of people: those who believe. “Whosoever believeth” means:

Anyone who believes in Christ

Everyone who believes in Christ

Only one who believes in Christ

**IV. What is the message of John 3:16?** It teaches that God’s sovereign love resulted in Him giving His only begotten Son for the salvation of doomed, dying sinners. That love ensures that everyone who believes in Christ will not perish, but has everlasting life. The verse does not tell us who CAN be saved. It tells us who SHALL be saved; “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The uniform teaching of Scripture is that salvation is an actuality, not a mere potential that the sinner activates by his own good deed. It is a finished work of God, not a work to be completed by man. And it is for everyone who believes, not for everyone indiscriminately.

**V. Why is the message of John 3:16 given?** A frequent objection to the truths proclaimed in this message is, “If God has predestined some unto salvation, they will be saved no matter what. Why then evangelize?” Many biblical answers can be given to this question. One is: “Because Christ evangelized.” John 3:16 is an example of Him proclaiming the message of salvation. Another answer is that He instructed the disciples to evangelize: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

God has ordained who shall be saved. But this fact does not exclude evangelistic activity, rather,

it encourages evangelism; it makes evangelism necessary and fruitful. For the One who ordained the end—the salvation of His elect—has also ordained the means by which His elect will be brought to believe in Him. That means is the proclamation of the gospel.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:13-15).