

JOHN 3:16 REVISITED

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As we covered last week ... many churches and tv evangelists focus on a message of The Love of God for this world. Almost as if it's just the "Gospel of Love".

Bishop Curry at the Royal Wedding talked of the Power of Love. Once we all love each other ... we'll create the new heavens and the new earth.

We're all God's children ... brothers and sisters. God loves us all ... and His love is unconditional ... there is nothing you can do to make God love you more ... or there is nothing you can do to make God love you less.

"Love" tends to be used in a modern sentimental "soft" way ... I love pizza ... I love ice cream ... I love my dog. "Love" in the sense that we find something to be delightful ... we enjoy it ... it makes us feel good ... feel happy. Apparently ... that's how God finds us all.

So ... this message goes ... "God Loves The World. Everybody is His child. Won't you please accept and receive His love".

Yet ... if we look to the Bible for our views ... there's a problem.

The Bible says very little about God's love for the world!

The Love of God for us is only mentioned about 35 times in the whole Bible ... about one verse in every 1,000! Hardly at all.

Genesis = 0 Exodus = 1 Leviticus = 0 Numbers = 0 Deuteronomy = 1

Some say that's what you'd expect from the harsh God of the Old Testament. Once you get to the New Testament ... it will be different. Is it?

Matthew = 0 Mark = 0 Luke = 0 Acts = 0 Revelation = 0

And in those few verses where the Love of God is mentioned ... it's addressed to Believers ... God's own Begotten Sons and Daughters ... not to the world.

As far as this idea of God loving everyone unconditionally is concerned ... let's have a look:

This is addressed to God's people Israel. What does He say about them?

Hosea 9:15 (NKJV)

15 "All their wickedness is in Gilgal,

For there I hated them.

Because of the evil of their deeds

I will drive them from My house;

I will love them no more.

All their princes are rebellious.

Isn't God's love unconditional? No. He won't love them anymore. Let's see another example:

Psalms 11:4-6 (NKJV)

4 The Lord is in His holy temple,

The Lord's throne is in heaven;

His eyes behold,

His eyelids test the sons of men.

5 The Lord tests the righteous,

But **the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.**

6 **Upon the wicked He will rain coals;**

Fire and brimstone and a burning wind (the Lake of Fire ... that's where they are going)

Shall be the portion of their cup.

Is this just the harsh God of the Old Testament?

When Jesus was upon the earth ... didn't He speak of the wheat and tares ... the tares to be burned up. When Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders ... He said they had the devil as their father.

So Jesus has unconditional love towards everyone?

Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

21 **“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.** (Doesn’t everyone go to heaven?)

22 **Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ (haven’t we preached about the love of Jesus everywhere? Held conferences. Travelled around the world preaching about Your love?)**

23 **And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’**

Just calling Jesus “Lord” isn’t sufficient. Action is required! Those who practice lawlessness are rejected. No hint of unconditional love.

There is a potential danger in preaching the Love of God indiscriminately to the world. A bit like casting your pearls before swine?

Two common reactions to this preaching of unconditional love:

1. If God loves us anyway ... no matter what ... I’ll live just the way I am.
2. No such God can exist. If there was an all-powerful being who had such great love ... He’d do something about the world’s pain and suffering. Therefore there is no God.

But doesn’t the best-known ... most-translated verse in the whole Bible tell us of God’s great love for mankind?

John 3:16 (NKJV)

16 **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.**

There is quite a lot in this verse!

Most “interpret” as God so.o.o.o very much loves (present tense) the world. The basis of their preaching ... God loves everyone so very very much.

John 3:16 (CEV)

16 God loved the people of the world **so much** that He gave His only Son ...”

That’s not what the Greek means at all. And translators would know that ... but are trapped by tradition.

The Greek for “so” is “Houto” which appears more than 200 times. It means “thus” or “in this manner” or “in this way” ... it doesn’t mean so very very much.

Three examples:

Matthew 6:9 (NKJV)

9 **In this manner**, therefore, pray: (*Houto* = “in this manner”)

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Matthew 12:40 (NKJV)

40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, **so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.** (*Houto* = “so”)

Matthew 17:12 (NKJV)

12 But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. **Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.** (*Houto* = “likewise” or “thus”)

What manner? As explained in:

John 3:14-15 (NKJV)

14 And **as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so** (*Greek: “Houto”*) **must the Son of Man be lifted up,**

15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

We won’t turn to Numbers 21:4-9 ... but the penalty of Israel’s sin was death by fiery serpents. God didn’t remove the penalty. He left the fiery serpents there.

But He did make provision. Make a bronze serpent and put it upon a pole very high ... and look at the Bronze Serpent ... “lifted up” ... and be saved. So ... likewise ... Houto ... Jesus would be lifted up ... and those who look at Him will be saved.

That’s how God Loved The World!

John 3:16 doesn't say God Loves The World ... delights in it ... today! He says he demonstrated His love 2,000 years ago ... by lifting up His Son ... and those who look up to Him will be saved.

If people don't look to Jesus ... John 3:16 says clearly they will perish (be destroyed). How can you ignore that?

There are 2 sides to John 3:16! Most seem to ignore the second half?

John 3:16-18 (NKJV)

16 **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.**

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but **he who does not believe is condemned** already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **(don't believe in Jesus ... then you are condemned)**

John 3:36 (NKJV)

36 **He who believes (having faith) in the Son has everlasting life;** and **he who does not believe (disobeys) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**" *(Don't believe = you are under wrath)*

Notice also the verse tenses in John 3:16. Something God did in the past ... available today **to the one who believes and continues to believe.**

Whilst in John Chapter 3 ... there is one other aspect to notice.

In many Bibles ... and especially obvious in red-letter Bibles ... John 3:16 is spoken by Jesus.

Here's Jesus speaking to Nicodemus (see verse 1) and seems to be talking to an unconverted person about the Love of God.

My red-letter Bible shows Jesus as speaking all the way down to verse 21. Very unlikely.

It looks more like Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus finishes at verse 15. From verse 16 onwards ... should not be in red-letters. It is the Apostle John giving his commentary about what the cross accomplished.

The style is very different after verse 15. Before that ... very personal ... Jesus uses lots of "I" or "we" or "me" ... none after verse 15.

Also ... note in verse 16 how Jesus is described. Jesus is referred to as the "only Begotten Son". Nowhere else does Jesus use this term for Himself. His favourite expression for Himself was "Son of Man" (over 80 times including verses 13 and 14).

There is no reference anywhere where Jesus calls Himself the "only Begotten Son". The "Only Begotten" is a term that the Apostle John uses.

John 1:14 (NKJV)

14 And **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of **the only begotten of the Father**, full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 (NKJV)

18 No one has seen God at any time. **The only begotten Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

So it looks like my red-letter NKJV is wrong. From John 3:16 we have John giving his exposition of what Jesus had meant when talking to Nicodemus.

(Some translations do finish their quotes at verse 15: RSV/NET/WEYMOUTH and others).

So ... Jesus wasn't explaining the Love of God to Nicodemus.

But the Apostle John is talking about the Love of God and isn't John's gospel written specially for unbelievers? To help convert them? Is that the case?

John 20:30-31 (NKJV)

30 And **truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;**

31 **but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**

Written that you may believe! Written to unbelievers so that they may believe?

I've seen inexpensive copies of the Gospel of John in Bible bookshops ... to be used for evangelical purposes.

Of course ... God's Word can reach some people ... no matter how it's presented. Somewhere along the line ... we all responded.

But actually ... despite what we see there ... John didn't write His gospel to unbelievers ... to convert them.

We need a little bit of Church history!

John wrote his letters and Gospel quite late in his life (about 95AD) ... a time of falling away ... heresy and deception in the Church. You may recall in 2 Peter Chapter 2 ... Peter prophesied that many would follow false teachers. That happened.

A particular problem in John's latter years evolved around a false teacher ... Cerinthus (Both were based in Ephesus at that time).

One of Cerinthus' main heresies was that Jesus was only a man. A created being. He did not exist prior to His human birth. He was not a divine being.

John set out to re-confirm to the brethren that Jesus was indeed a God-being from heaven! With that in mind ... let's look at:

John 1:1-3 (NKJV)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

The Logos was God ... the Creator ... Jesus Christ.

John 1:14 (NKJV)

14 And **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

God was made flesh ... Jesus Christ.

Straight to the point! “Put that in your pipe, Cerinthus!!”

Then ... John structures his entire gospel around 7 witnesses of the truth that Jesus was divine. Seven witnesses and 7 signs to back it up ... and 7 “I am” statements from Jesus.

All to ram home the truth. Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 1:1-4 (NKJV)

1 ***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—***

2 ***the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness***, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

3 ***that which we have seen and heard we declare to you***, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Seen ... heard ... observed ... touched ... HE’S REAL! We are witnesses.

John is doing his best to assure believers that it’s all genuine. “I was there! I witnessed this. I leaned on Jesus’ bosom ... I saw Him on the cross ... I looked after Jesus’ mother. Jesus is God ... believe it!” And ... he’s talking to believers!

1 John 2:21-26 (NKJV)

21 ***I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.***

22 ***Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.***

23 ***Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either***; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

24 **Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.**

25 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.

26 **These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.**

Jesus is the Christ! Stick with what you heard in the beginning. Don't be deceived!

John 20:30-31 (NKJV)

30 And **truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;**

31 but **these are written that you may believe (and continue to believe) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**

Written to encourage existing believers to persevere in their faith. Not to be swayed by the deceptions from the likes of Cerinthus.

John 20:31 (NLT)

31 But **these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, ...**

So ... it seems that the Gospel of John ... which mentions the Love of God in a number of places ... such as John 3:16 ... was actually written to believers ... not to the unconverted.

Although John 3:16 is preached indiscriminately ... to the world ... it's reality for you and me.

The Love of God is too special to just "dump it" out there on a largely hostile carnal world. Casting pearls before swine.

"Great ... God thinks I'm special. But I'll just live the way I please ... and I'll still be in heaven because of God's unconditional love. After all ... the scripture says that God loves the whole world so very much".

Very one-sided? Ministers don't want to offend anyone ... wouldn't want to preach any sort of "fear religion" ... so just preach about God's unconditional love!!

Matthew 10:28 (NKJV)

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Destroy = Apollumi)

God gave His Son 2,000 years ago. Those who don't look to Him ... and continue to believe ... will perish.

Revelation 21:1 (NKJV)

1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

Revelation 21:8 (NKJV)

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

So this Gospel of Love is a very dangerous message. The message of God's unconditional love is misleading ... leaves many people in this world still in their sins. "If God finds me lovable ... and nothing I can do to make Him love me less ..."

Many millions ... up to 2 billion ... heard Bishop Curry preach about "all we need is love" ... that we're all God's children. No we are not! False Gospel! False Message!

The Love of God has great meaning for you and me. But ... for the world ... it's the wrong message ... that's why it features so rarely in the Bible.