

John 3:16

by J.C. Ryle

God's love for the world is a love of pity and compassion, expressed through the gift of His only-begotten Son, and offered to all mankind.

Scripture: Ezekiel 33:11, John 1:10, John 3:16, John 6:32, John 8:12, Romans 3:19, 1 Timothy 2:4, Titus 3:4, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "God's Love", "Universal Salvation"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound truth of John 3:16, illustrating that God's love extends to all humanity, not just the Jewish nation, and that the gift of His only begotten Son is a universal offer of salvation. He challenges the notion that God's love is limited to the elect, arguing instead that it encompasses every person, regardless of their background, and is rooted in compassion rather than mere approval. Ryle highlights the significance of the word 'so' in the verse, indicating the depth and magnitude of God's love for a fallen world. He asserts that this love is not only real but essential for understanding God's character and His desire for all to come to repentance and faith. Ultimately, Ryle's message is a call to recognize the inclusive nature of God's love and the invitation to eternal life through belief in Christ.

Transcript

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

Our Lord, in this verse, shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." Nicodemus probably thought, like many Jews, that God's purposes of mercy were entirely confined to his chosen people Israel, and that when Messiah appeared, he would appear only for the special benefit of the Jewish nation. Our Lord here declares to him that God loves all the world, without any exception; that the Messiah, the only-begotten Son of God, is the Father's gift to the whole family of Adam; and that everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes on him for salvation may have eternal life. A more startling declaration to the ears of a rigid Pharisee it is impossible to conceive! A more wonderful verse is not to be found in the Bible! That God should love such a wicked world as this and not hate it, that he should love it so as to provide salvation, that in order to provide salvation he should give not an angel but such a priceless gift as his only-begotten Son, that this great salvation should be freely offered to everyone that believes, all this is wonderful indeed! This was indeed a "heavenly thing."

The words, "God loved the world," have received two very different interpretations. The importance of the subject in the present day makes it desirable to state both views fully.

Some think that the "world" here means God's elect out of every nation, whether Jews or Gentiles, and that the "love" with which God is said to love them is that eternal love with which the elect were loved before creation began, and by which their calling, justification, preservation and final salvation are completely secured. This view, though supported by many and great divines, does not appear to me to be our Lord's meaning. For one thing, it seems to me a violent straining of language to confine the word "world" to the elect. "The world" is undoubtedly a name sometimes given to the "wicked" exclusively. But I cannot see that it is a name ever given to the saints. For another thing, to interpret the word "world" of the elect only, is to ignore the distinction which, to my eyes, is plainly drawn in the text between the whole of mankind and those out of mankind who "believe." If the "world" means only the believing portion of mankind, it would have been quite enough to say, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that the world should not perish." But our Lord does not say so. He says, "that whosoever believes;" in other words, "that whosoever out of the world believes." Lastly, to confine God's love to the elect is taking a harsh and narrow view of God's character and fairly lays Christianity open to the modern charges brought against it as cruel and unjust to the ungodly: If God takes no thought for any but his elect, and cares for none beside, how shall God judge the world? I believe in the electing love of God the Father as strongly as anyone. I regard the special love with which God loves the sheep whom he has given to Christ from all eternity as a most blessed and comfortable truth, and one most cheering and profitable to believers. I only say, that it is not the truth of this text.

The true view of the words, "God loved the world," I believe to be this. The "world" means the whole race of mankind, both saints and sinners, without any exception. The word, in my opinion, is so used in John 1:10,29; 6:33,51; 8:12; Rom. 3:19; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2 and 4:14. The "love" spoken of is that love of pity and compassion with which God regards all his creatures, and specially regards mankind. It is the same feeling of "love" which appears in Psalm 145:9, Ezek. 33:11, John 6:32, Titus 3:4, 1 John 4:10, 2 Pet. 3:9, and 1 Tim. 2:4. It is a love unquestionably distinct and separate from the special love with which God regards his saints. It is a love of pity and not of approbation or complaisance. But it is, not the less, a real love. It is a love which clears God of injustice in judging the world.

I am quite familiar with the objections commonly brought against the theory I have just propounded. I find no weight in them. Those who confine God's love exclusively to the elect appear, to me, to take a narrow and contracted view of God's character and attributes. They refuse to God that attribute of compassion with which even an earthly father can regard a profligate son, who can offer to him pardon even though his compassion is despised and his offers refused. I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system. The following quotations from one whom, for convenience sake, I must call a thorough Calvinist--I mean Bishop Davenant--will show that the view I advocate is not new.

"The general love of God toward mankind is so clearly testified in Holy Scripture, and so demonstrated by the manifold effects of God's goodness and mercy extended to every particular man in this world, that to doubt thereof were infidelity, and to deny it plain blasphemy." (Davenant's Answer to Hoard, p. 1)

"God hates nothing which Himself created. And yet it is most true that He hates sin in any creature, and hates the creature infected with sin, in such manner as hatred may be attributed to God. But for all this, He so generally loved mankind, fallen in Adam, that He has given His only begotten Son, that what sinner

soever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And this everlasting life is so provided for man by God, that no decrees of His can bring any man thither without faith and repentance; and no decrees of His can keep any man out who repents and believes. As for the measure of God's love exhibited in the external effect unto man, it must not be denied that God pours out His grace more abundantly on some men than on others, and works more powerfully and effectually in the hearts of some than of others, and that out of His alone will and pleasure. But yet, when this more special love is not extended, His less special love is not restrained to outward and temporal mercies, but reaches to internal and spiritual blessings, even such as will bring men to an eternal blessedness, if their voluntary wickedness hinders not." (Davenant's Answer to Hoard, p. 469)

Calvin observes on this text, "Christ brought life, because the heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish." Again he says, "Christ employed the universal term whosoever, both to invite indiscriminately all to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such also is the import of the term world. Though there is nothing in the world that is worthy of God's favor, yet He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ."

The little word "so" in this verse has called forth many remarks on account of its depth of meaning. It doubtless signifies "so greatly, so much, so dearly." Bishop Sanderson observes: "How much that 'so' contains, no tongue or wit of man can reach: nothing expresses it better to the life than the work itself does."

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