

John 3:16: Does God Really Love The World?

How Far Does God's Love Extend?

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Herbert W. Armstrong used to say if the world believes something, it is probably wrong. This was said in the context of religion and he certainly did not mean that the world did not get anything at all right. It was not wrong in every single thing that it did. But I think that toward the end of his life, very many disbelieved what he said, or at least ignored and disregarded his advice, because the Worldwide Church of God leadership, almost as soon as he died, began a headlong plunge back into what the world believes.

He also said during a sermon, and if I recall correctly it was around 1977 or 1978, that he first detected Laodiceanism in the church in 1969. That is twenty-six years ago. It has taken a long time for it to build up a full head of steam, but it did build, and it has rent the church into very many pieces.

Laodiceanism is not of the Spirit of God. I think it would be good for you to turn to Revelation 3. It is not of the Spirit of God because Christ is highly critical of it.

Revelation 3:16-17 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

Obviously Laodiceanism has a source other than the Head of the church, and in this context there is only one other possible source. Laodiceanism is an attitude that came into the church from the world. And we have taught that it is an attitude of spiritual listlessness, or we might say a lack of zeal, that causes one to neglect his spiritual responsibilities.

I think that teaching is right, but I want to add something more specific to it. It is an attitude that neglects God because the one having it is expending his energies doing something else. *Laodicea*, as I have read in Bible dictionaries and commentaries, has a number of definitions. The one that I feel is most appropriate is "judgment of the people."

Even the history of the city is salted with some interesting judgments. Whenever the city was founded, it was founded at the crossroads of two major trading routes. If you stop to think of the major cities in the world and where they are established, I think that you will find that almost all of them are not founded in that kind of a location. Most cities are founded on rivers, or where there are natural deep harbors, or in a strategic, easily defended location. But it was the judgment of the founding fathers of Laodicea to establish it away from a natural water supply and on a fairly wide open plain where it was easily attacked and very difficult to defend.

The access to easy money to be gained from the caravans passing through perverted their judgment, and history records that these people, the ones who lived in Laodicea, were affected by this, and though they became wealthy through trading, they also became very adept at compromise and appeasement because their judgment had put them into a precarious military position.

In Revelation, the Laodicean judges himself as being rich and increased with goods and having need of nothing. That is the judgment of the people. That, to me, is evidence of self-satisfaction. It seems to be based on his physical well-being.

Rich is a relative term. Rich compared to what? We do not know what the Laodicean is comparing himself against. We only know from the context that his spiritual orientation was carnal and, therefore, he was rich in material goods. We can clearly see from God's description that He put in the word here that the Laodicean is self-satisfied.

God's judgment of the people on the other hand is that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked—two very different judgments from two very different perspectives. What was important to God was the spiritual. What was important to the Laodicean was the material. That gives us a clear illustration that God and man, even men in the church, converted people, tend to look at things quite differently from different perspectives.

Turn with me back to the book of Isaiah in chapter 55. See, there is enough carnality in all of us, enough living by sight, that we do not always see things the way that God does. But God Himself testifies:

Isaiah 55:8-9 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

His thoughts are exceedingly higher than ours, and that is one reason Mr. Armstrong said what he did—that if the world, which is operating from an entirely different spirit, thinks well of something, it is probably wrong, or it is certainly something of lesser importance than what God would judge to be important.

As the Worldwide Church of God gradually adopted the world's doctrines, it also gradually adopted the world's attitudes and the world's way of looking at things. They go hand in hand. It cannot be avoided. So as they "progress" in this, their perspective changes, and the world continually looks more sophisticated and attractive to them than the things of God, and the things of God begin to look more and more childish and elementary. And thus it is inevitable that Christmas, Halloween, Easter, and probably Sunday will be part of the doctrinal structure, and that the Sabbath, and the holy days, and for that matter, virtually anything of revealed truth will go.

What this world has produced through its way of looking at things is evidenced by its fruits—that is, its greedy, warring cultures, its perverted religion, its extremely disproportionate distribution of wealth, its entertainments, its educational system, its mass confusion in politics. That is its fruit. God calls it Babylon the Great—great confusion.

Their doctrines may be mysterious and sometimes difficult for people to figure out. The practices and the fruit of the doctrinal and the attitude changes are clear evidence of where they are receiving their motivation. It is coming right out of the world.

What does God reveal about what He thinks about the world? One of the more popular beliefs of our day is that God loves everybody. The belief seems to be that no matter how much enmity, no matter how much damage a person or institution does against God or against His people, God still loves them. You have probably heard it said that God loves the sinner but He hates the sin.

Is it true that God loves one who is rejecting and despising His Son? Do you not think that rather glosses over God's holiness and justice, making God look like some kind of a snugly teddy bear, a pushover, one that nobody really needs to fear, and at the same time it virtually gives people permission for the sinner to continue in his way? Is God really feared in such a circumstance? Well let me tell you, God's love, we are going to see, is for His saints, for His children.

I am sure that by this time already you are thinking of this verse:

John 3:16 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.

What does God mean by *love* in this context? The next time you get into a conversation (I am talking about a friendly conversation; I am not talking about an argument) with somebody who has accepted this concept that all one needs is love in order to be saved, ask them very nicely, "Please give me your definition of love." It might turn out to be an interesting concept.

If you are using your mind and you are listening carefully to their answers, you can begin to direct the conversation by asking some other questions. The one question you want to ask for sure is, "Where is your authority for that definition? What authority is there to undergird that definition that you've given me?" And if their definition of love is not the same as God's definition of it, you know that these people are establishing their own definition, or they have picked it up from another man.

Now love, indeed, is a many splendored thing and it includes affection on several levels. It is multi-faceted. But any definition that does not have I John 5:3 in it, that "love is the keeping of the commandments and those commandments are not burdensome," is not from a high enough authority, not from a high enough standard. We are going to see that God's love for the world is quite impersonal and it exists only in relation to His overall purpose. It is in no way warm and the personal concern that He has for His children, and there is a very dramatic difference between the two of them.

Isaiah 1:5-6 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.

God here is describing the spiritual condition of the nation of Judah, but this is also describing the spiritual condition of singular individuals as well on the basis that the whole, that is the nation, is but the sum of its parts, that is the individuals, and each individual was to some degree just like the nation. And if the people were not in a poor moral and spiritual condition then the nation would not have been in a poor moral and physical condition. They would not be as God is describing here.

God is describing the worldliness of His people Judah. His covenant people were sick from the top of the head to the soles of the feet and He is unhappy about it. If He were happy about it, if He really, let us say, loved them the way the world describes John 3:16, He would not say what He did there in verse 16: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil."

You can see that they are not acceptable to Him. If they were acceptable to Him, why is He commanding them to change? Let us continue to develop this. We are going to go back to the book of Genesis in chapter 18. This is where Abraham is appealing to God just prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 18:23-25 And Abraham came near, and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked, far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

God does not make a direct reply to Abraham's question, but His response makes it clear that to the righteous He is a Savior, but He destroys the wicked. Does that sound as though He loves them? Does He love what they are doing? Keep asking yourself that question.

You might think that I am going pretty far out, but I want you to think about another of God's recordings of mankind's history. Think of that period just before the Flood and how unrighteous they were. Are we going to say that God loves unrighteousness? "God so loved the world . . ." Is the world righteous? Does He love unrighteousness? Does God love those doing the unrighteousness?

Do you recall in the book of Jeremiah, it was so bad in Jeremiah's day that God challenged Jeremiah to go out and find even one person that was seeking after truth? I do not think that God loved that at all, but it was not very long that He bashed Judah into submission. Is it possible that John 3:16 does not mean what this world twists it into meaning?

Let us go to Jeremiah 17. I tell you, these people would practically have God loving sin.

Jeremiah 17:1 The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, with the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars.

Notice this powerful, strong language here. He said their sin, their way of living, is engraved, as it were, upon stony hearts.

Jeremiah 17:5-6 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited."

Can anything grow in salt? It is pronouncing a death sentence on those who depart from the Lord and who do not trust Him.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? [*Desperately wicked* means *incurably sick*. This is not the kind of sickness that one can feel pity toward because somebody is in agony as a result of something physically wrong with them. We are talking about a sickness of the heart, a sickness of the spirit, an incurable nature.] I, the LORD, search the heart, I try the reins, even [here is the reason why] to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

Whatever a person sows they reap. It is just another way of saying that.

Jeremiah 17:13 "O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be ashamed [Jeremiah is speaking now]. Those who depart from Me [sounds like God] shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters."

Do you know what *written in the earth* means? It is the opposite of being written in heaven. If somebody's name is written in the earth, they have had it. It is the lake of fire for them.

Jeremiah 17:15 Indeed they say to me [Jeremiah is speaking again], "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come now!"

How presumptuous and proud. We can take anything you give can give out, God.

Jeremiah 17:16-17 As for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows You. Nor have I desired the woeful day; You know what what came out of my lips; it was right there before You. Do not be a terror to me [Jeremiah prays]. You are my hope in the day of doom.

Now look at this prayer, this request that he makes of God.

Jeremiah 17:18 Let them be ashamed who persecute me, but do not let me be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom, and destroy them with double destruction!

Do you know what that means? Twice dead. Do you know what that means? That means the Lake of Fire. Jeremiah, a godly man, one of the great saints, a man really close to God—does that not sound kind of out of place to our concept of Christianity crying out to God to bring the Lake of Fire upon people? Apparently God did not think it was out of line. He recorded it here, the prayer of a godly man.

Are you aware that in the book of Acts, which contains the history of the evangelistic efforts of the church of God in the first century—as we would say today, "the church's outreach to the world"—the love of God is never once mentioned in context to their evangelistic efforts? It is only mentioned in relation to the saints. Specifically, God gives His Spirit to those that love Him—that kind of approach.

Now if it be true that God loves every member of the human family, then why did Christ say what He did here in John 14? Pay careful attention to what He says.

John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him."

Did you notice a condition there?

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

Do you see that Jesus is demanding a reciprocity in the relationship? Do you know what *reciprocate* means? It means *back and forth*. The internal combustion engines that we have in our automobiles are reciprocating engines. They go back and forth. They reciprocate through four cycles, and then come back to where they were before.

What God is saying here is that there has to be reciprocity. There has to be movement back and forth, a mutual exchange of action in a relationship. That, incidentally, is the formal definition of the word *reciprocity*: *mutual exchange of action in a relationship*.

Ask yourself something. If you can remember all the way back to your dating period in your life, and you had an interest in somebody and your interest in that person was stronger than their interest in you and they did not reciprocate your interest in them, what happened to the relationship? It ended. No love developed. It is that simple. God demands reciprocity, but He loves first. But He wants us to reciprocate. And then what happens? There is a constant cycling back and forth. But it also goes out to others who are our brethren as we are going to see.

Let us go back to the book of Proverbs. In this chapter, wisdom is being personified, but it is an attribute of God, and it is just as though God is speaking and He says:

Proverbs 8:17 I love those who love me [That is pretty blunt. That is pretty clear.]; and those who seek me early will find me.

Let us go back a little further into the Psalms, chapter 5, and we are going to look at three or four verses here. Now look at this verse very carefully.

Psalm 5:5 The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity.

Did you see that? That is a direct repudiation of that statement that God loves the sinner, but He hates the sin. He says, "I hate the workers of iniquity," or, "You hate all workers of iniquity."

Psalm 5:6 You shall destroy those who speak falsehood [or lies]; the LORD abhors [another synonym for hate] the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Shades of Jeremiah, only David is the author. But it seems like David and Jeremiah think a lot alike, both godly men.

Psalm 5:10 Pronounce them guilty, O God! Let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against You.

Psalm 7:11 God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

Well, that is enough out of the Old Testament. Let us jump into the New Testament, back to the book of John. We are going to go right into John 3, but not yet verse 16. It is the last verse in that chapter, the same chapter that contains "God so loved the world."

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides [continues, remains] on him."

This is a side of God that we do not like to think about. There is a very stern justice in God. How many times have you heard Mr. Armstrong say years ago, "God will not budge one inch with His law"? God is serious about us being formed into the image of His Son, into His image. He is serious about us overcoming sin. He is serious about giving us eternal life. He is serious about our returning the love that He gives to us, because if we do not return that love to Him, then we are not going to be in His image. We will never get along with Him in the Kingdom. It would be very much like two people marrying who hate one another. Our minds have to be in harmony with His, and our lives have to show the reflection of that. It has to show a reflection of what is in our mind.

Brethren, if God loves all equally and without exception, it turns His governance through law into just meaningless rhetoric. It turns God's threats into nothing but the vain blatherings of a weak and frustrated king whom men can turn on with impunity and do their own thing regardless of what He says. What advantage then is there in repentance and growth?

Now I bring these things up because the general theme of what has been done in the Worldwide Church of God has been based on this very premise, that God so loves everybody that He is going to accept one and all. That gives people permission to disregard much of God's law. "Go ahead, establish your own day of worship. Go ahead, establish your own holidays. But on the other hand, make sure that you don't judge anybody. Just copy God. He loves everybody."

But let us not lose sight of the fact that in God's Word it says, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." You can do what you want with that word *hate*. Look it up. It would be an interesting little study because that is quoted in Romans 9:13. In the Greek, that word *hate* can mean anything from slighting a person to an active ill-will. Generally people like to say that it means *to love less by comparison*. I am not going to say that is wrong, but love how much less? We do not know. It could be very great.

Now if you go back to the book of Malachi where that is first uttered, Malachi 1, and look at it in the Hebrew, you are going to find that the Hebrew word is much stronger than the Greek word, and it includes active detestation. When Paul quoted that he had it in the sense that God chose Jacob even before they were born. When you look at it in the Old Testament, it is with the sense that Esau had just rejected God's offer of the birthright and the blessing.

How would you feel brethren, just humanly, if you offered somebody that you had some love and respect for, a wonderful gift, and they spit on it? That is basically what Esau did. He despised his birthright, the book of Hebrews says, and he traded it for a meal that was only going to last him a couple of hours.

Do you think that God does not have feelings? If you can feel rejection, so can He. If you can feel happiness and peace and contentment and well-being, so can He because we got these things from Him. But His are on a much higher level and there is absolute and total control of them. But our feelings are, you might say, an imitation of His, for we are not in His image.

Now go back with me to the book of Revelation in chapter 6. Here is the fifth seal.

Revelation 6:9-10 When he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

This is right in harmony with David and Jeremiah, and here we have dead saints who are figuratively praying, crying out in their grave for vengeance, for just retribution. You see the pattern once it is established. We find that it continues right on through the Word, because God never changes.

Let us turn a little bit later in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 16:8-9 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Revelation 16:11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Revelation 16:21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

These people are not showing any indication at all of loving God, so how can there be any reciprocity? We like to think that hardly anybody is going to go into the Lake of Fire without having had the opportunity for salvation. The flaw in that thinking is that we are not these peoples' judge. What does God consider an opportunity? There may be quite a number of people who go into the Lake of Fire without having had what we might consider that opportunity. God is judge. We know for sure that Revelation shows the Beast and the False Prophet going into the lake which burns with fire. Just something to think about.

What about John 3:16? Let us go back there. We are going to jump around a bit, so it would be a good idea to hold your finger in John for a while because we will keep coming back to somewhere in John. The verse says:

John 3:16 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.

This is one of those verses that we have heard so often, we think we already know what it means. But I would bet that most of the times that you heard that, it has been out in the world or coming from a source out in the world. Part of the difficulty that we have in this verse lies in assuming that we understand what the Bible means by the word *world*.

The Bible uses a number of terms in widely different ways. One example that I think that most of you are aware of is the word *spirit*. E. W. Bullinger in his Companion Bible in the appendix shows that

the word *spirit* is used nine different ways in both Testaments in the Bible. In other words, the word *spirit* has wide application, and if we are going to be accurate in understanding, we have to look at the way the word is being used within the context in which it appears.

Now such is true with the word *world*. It is the Greek word *cosmos*. Sometimes it is spelled *cosmos* and sometimes it is spelled with a "k" at the beginning. It also is a word with wide application and you have to look into the context in order to find out more specifically exactly what it means. Its basic usage is similar to the English word *ordered* or *arranged*. It indicates a system, an orderly system.

You might be able to understand it better if I give you its opposite, its antonym. The opposite of *cosmos* is *chaos*. That is disordered, disorganized, confusion. Something that is *cosmos* is something that is ordered, systematized.

I am going to give you a number of contexts in which the word *cosmos* is used. In Acts 17, Paul was in Athens. He is on Mars Hill. He is talking to the Greeks there, and he says:

Acts 17:24 God, who made the world [*cosmos*] and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

There *cosmos* indicates the created physical universe, heaven and earth, everything. Back to the book of John, this time in chapter 13, where Jesus used the word *cosmos*, or at least John did talking of Jesus.

John 13:1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world . . .

Where was He going to leave? He was going to leave the earth and go to heaven to be back with the Father. *Cosmos* here means the *earth*. Okay, in John 12, this is the one where Jesus used it.

John 12:31 "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."

Here *world* is being used of the anti-God, political-religious economic system under Satan. This is probably its most common usage, the one most frequently used. It is the anti-God, political-religious economic system under Satan. Hold your finger in John. We are going to go to Romans 3. This one's kind of interesting in light of the Covenant series.

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Here the most specific application of the word *world* means *those who are under the law*. In this case the verse itself defines its specific use. You begin to get the idea. You have to look at the context to understand its most specific use. But even here you have to be a little bit careful because every once in awhile there are verses in other parts of the Bible that impact upon what the word *world* means.

Now back to the book of John, this time in chapter 15 and in verse 18. This one is pretty specific, but it again is nonetheless true.

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you."

The word *world* here is all of humanity, minus those who did not hate Christ, those who do not hate God.

Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in.

Here the *world* is the world of Gentiles. In this case, the context excludes those in Israel who can see.

Back to John 3:16. In this context, the subject here involves Nicodemus, who is a Jew, and it is good to understand what the Jews thought about their relationship to God under the Old Covenant and what they thought was true, I mean it was basically true, and that is that God's mercies were confined to Israel. Now as a generality that was true because God even says in Amos 3:2, "With you only have I made this covenant. Of all the people in the world, I've shown you My love." That is basically what it says. So what Nicodemus undoubtedly believed was that God's mercies were confined to his own nation.

However, what Christ was beginning to enter into was His announcement that God's mercies were going to be extended to the regions beyond Israel, Judah—in other words, to the Gentiles. But the covenant that He was going to make with people, the New Covenant, was not going to be confined just to Israel. It was going to be opened up to the Gentiles. It was ultimately to become worldwide in its scope.

Now Nicodemus did not know that. Jesus Christ knew that, and you can begin to follow this through the book of John in chapter 4. Another step is taken with the woman at the well. He announced to her that it is not going to be long before you are not going to go to Jerusalem to worship God, and the Temple is going to be of no value in terms of a relationship with God.

Nicodemus did not understand that and that, at least partly, led that God was going to begin to expand His operations. In other words, I am saying here that His world, or the world of His people was going to include Gentiles. Now look at verse 15.

John 3:15 That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

I am sure that Nicodemus would have interpreted this *whoever* means anybody who is a Jew. But subsequent events showed that Jesus meant all nations. Before we get leaping too far, does this mean that God loves every individual among the Gentiles? Well, hardly, because we have seen *world* used in a general sense rather than a specific sense. You see, it is relative to its context.

Turn to II Peter 2.

II Peter 2:5 And did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.

Think back to the Flood. We see two worlds. Peter makes that clear. Who died? Who lived? There was one world and they all perished. There was another world of godly people with Noah on the ark. There is an ungodly world and there is a godly world. That is clear.

Back to John 6. Do you remember Abraham and his dealing with God? Was he not saying the same thing, saying, "God, is the world of the godly going to die with the world of the ungodly?" He said, "God forbid." And of course God did. He spared the godly people there. But the ungodly died.

We are beginning to see a clear division. God divides the world up into those who are His and those He loves and preserves. The others, though, well you can fill in the blanks.

John 6:33 "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

We can of course see in the overall sense that may include everybody. However there is something that narrows it down right in that verse. To whom does He give life? That makes *world* very specific.

Something can be offered, let us say the offer of eternal life, but an offer may be refused. Did we not just read in John 3:31 that those who believe not are going to perish, that the wrath of God is going to remain on them? The implication there is that there are going to be people who are offered everlasting life and they reject it. And so the wrath of God remains on them.

So a thing, even eternal life, may be offered and refused, but something that is already given and accepted. Who is in that class? Who is in that group? Who is in that world?—the sons of God. We are beginning to see there are several worlds in the context of the Bible and undoubtedly the two most important are the world of the ungodly and the world of the godly. As we continue to develop this, you are going to see that God loves the world of the godly in all of its fullness. But God loves the ungodly world only within the context of His purpose. And that love is not the same.

Does God give life to the ungodly, to the ungodly world? No, He only gives life to the godly. We can continue to develop this. Just very quickly I will show you that this theme carries through in quite a number of verses.

II Corinthians 5:19 That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

Who, pray tell, was reconciled to God? Those who have repented! Those who have accepted the blood of Jesus Christ. Those who have faith in His death. That is who's reconciled to Him, and that is the world that He is talking about there. And of course others are going to become part of it.

But if we are going to look at this specifically, God is clearly showing that there is a world of the godly. We find in I John 5:19, the whole world lies in sin. The whole world? No, the whole world does not lie in sin. There is one part of the world whose sins are forgiven: His children. Those who have received His love in its fullness. So we find that there is a world whose sins are still imputed to them, and there is a world whose sins are forgiven and the people are reconciled to God.

You should be able to begin to see, or maybe you are already seeing it clearly, that the objects of God's love in John 3:16 is His children. These are the same ones that John mentioned in I John 3:1 when he said, "What manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." God loves His own.

Look at John 3:16 again. There are three clauses at least in that verse. Now the first clause, the principle subject, is Christ as God's gift. What moved the Father to give that gift was His great love. God loves us before we love Him. That is what is covered in the first clause. The emphasis there, the focus, is on Christ as God's gift.

The second clause tells us for whom God gave His Son: for everyone who believes. And then the last clause tells us His purpose, that they might have eternal life, everlasting life. So the word *world* here refers to the world of believers, those God has called and chosen, those who are now His children.

Let us go to another verse and this thing will just leap right out at you.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His love toward us [Who is *us*? It is the church.], in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We still have another thing to attack here and that is, how does God express, how does He show His love toward the world? Because there is no doubt that He loves people in the world, but He does not love them with the fullness that He loves us and those who have come under the blood of Jesus Christ, have become begotten and are His children.

There are quite a number of verses that show the way that He does it. I will just give you some. Matthew 18:33. It says the wicked He pities. And of course He can be moved to compassion. In Luke 6:35 it says He is kind to the unthankful. In Romans 9:22 it says that He endures with much long-suffering those who are wicked.

Now we are going to go to Matthew 5, because you probably thought of this verse.

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; because He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.' "

I think that this expresses well how God shows His love for the ungodly. How does He do it? The verse tells us. Verse 45 tells us. He continues to serve His creatures despite their evil. But this is far from the fullness of His love. Has He given them His Spirit? Does He grant them access to Him? No. They have not had forgiveness yet either. Are you beginning to see that He has not yet given them the fullness of His love, but still He continues to serve them?

Love has both rational and emotional qualities to it. And service can be rational without the emotional aspect and yet it will still fall within the biblical definition of love. Love is the keeping of the commandments.

Or, another aspect of love—it can be passionately emotional and not be in the least rational. That is the *eros* kind, and that is what human love tends to be. Now in this context God's instruction to us is that we serve our enemy as He does, but on our own level, not on the same level He does. We cannot.

Look at this whole thing in its context, maybe ten or fifteen verses before it, and what does He say in those verses? He says do not retaliate. Go the extra mile. So when God asks us to love our enemy, He

is not asking the impossible of us. He is not asking us to affectionately embrace them. He is not saying that we should go on as though nothing has happened.

He is saying that we should express our love, and at the very least we will do nothing evil in return against them. That we will work to control our minds so that there is no hatred of them, which might motivate us to retaliate evil for evil. It means not speaking evil against them, or destroying their reputation even further. Let them destroy their own reputation.

It means being kind to them in the same manner that God would be kind to the evil. It means pitying them for their blindness. It means helping them in their need. It means trying to be a peacemaker. It means doing good for them.

Do you know what? You can do every one of those things rationally simply because you know it is the right thing to do, and you are not giving them the fullness of your love. Who do you reserve that fullness for? Do you not reserve it for those who are most intimate to you? Do you not reserve it for those who reciprocate your love?

Are you beginning to see what I mean? God is not asking us to do the impossible. So when He tells us to love our enemies, it does not mean we have to be best friends. It only means that we better not be the source, the instigator that made them our enemy, and we better not be a hindrance to peace being made, and in this way you will be loving them through service, even as God does by His own definition.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We are beginning to see something here. God is differentiating the intensity of our love. He does not expect it to be the same for the world as He expects it to be for our brethren, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

Brethren, God does not love everybody equally. Nowhere does He tell us to prefer the world of the ungodly. Nowhere does He tell us to be kindly affectionate to them either. Nowhere does He say that all men will be saved. He does say that He is not willing that any should perish, but universal salvation is not a doctrine of the Bible. It is something that men deduce.

There is no doubt that God will give opportunity for salvation to all, but each in his own order. And He loves sinners of all degrees, but only in the sense that He continues to serve His creation within the framework of His overall purpose, and as a result of His rational love, He does not bring upon them the second death without also giving them the opportunity for salvation without the veil being lifted from their eyes. But whether they repent is up to them. Whether they will live by faith working through love is up to them.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 7. I want you to see all the way back here.

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 The LORD did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but

because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Do you see that? Reciprocity. He expects us to love Him back and that is the only way an intimate relationship, oneness, can be developed. And we have to understand that. God reserves His special love to those who are His own, those who reciprocate His love by loving Him and preferring the brethren. Any other way, brethren, is going to take us right back to the world. The strength of Christianity is in that relationship. Your spiritual strength and my spiritual strength is in reciprocating back to Him the love that He first gives to us. And then He responds with even greater love because the bond gets closer.

This reciprocity factor is really interesting. You can look right in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said "Look, if you don't forgive others, God's not going to forgive you." That is reciprocity in action. He expects us to do with our life as He has done with us, and in that way the love is flowing out. It is reciprocating out to others in the way that He intended, and of course it flows right back to Him so that He says in Matthew 25 that if you have done it to the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me.

Why did I go through this? Because I want us to see that God's attitude toward the world is hardly one of benign acceptance, and when He says He loves the world it must be understood as love only in the sense of His concern for the outworking of His purpose. And in God's love for the world, we are going to see His rationality dominant in His dealings with mankind. He **hates** sin and He **hates** what those people are doing, and it is only because He has perfect control of His love that He does not just blast us into smithereens. But He endures it and patiently works with us and of course them.

We are going to finish up with one verse that we should have all thought of by this time:

I John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

That ought to be devastating in relation to our thoughts about the WCG. If we really have God's love, then we will love the world in the way God does. The WCG has gone back to the world. And if we have love for the world, how would we show it? We will follow the same principle that we would if we have love for God. We will submit to it. If we love God, we will submit to Him. Is that not what a wife does to her husband? If we love the world, we will submit to it.

The world lives by sight. The world lives according to the flesh. The flesh sets its mind on the things of the world. Now we cannot see what is in a person's mind, so how is a person's heart/mind revealed? Romans 8:7. It shows its enmity for God by breaking the law. It is rejecting God's government over Him by not submitting. And so what will happen to a person who does not submit? Again, Romans 8:6 and 13, it says they will die.

So worldliness is nothing more than thinking and behaving like the world. Laodiceanism is just one aspect of that. Those people have the wrong priorities because of what the mind is set on, and those people will not inherit the Kingdom of God because by their works they are revealing that they are not reciprocating back to God His love.

