

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The World Of John 3:16

(Jerry Fite)

Jesus said, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). While God no doubt values the physical world He created, Jesus affirms God’s love for the people who live on the planet. He loved human beings so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for all mankind. Or did He?

Calvinistic reformed theology teaches that Jesus died only for the elect. God, the Father, of His own will chose who would be saved, even before the creation of man. So, Jesus’ blood cleansed the sins of the chosen, and the life-giving Spirit gave these blood-bought, chosen people life. It is argued that Jesus’ blood is so efficacious that if He shed his blood for all, then all men would be saved. God’s will is so sovereign, that whom he chooses to be saved will be saved. Therefore, since we know that some will be saved in heaven, and some will be lost in Hell; God’s election, Jesus’ sacrificial death, and the Holy Spirit’s awakening life-giving power is pointed to a select group of people,

Reformed scholars today prefer this doctrine be labeled as

“definite atonement” instead of the popular designation of “limited atonement”. Limited atonement seems not as great and glorious as unlimited atonement. To them, what is glorious is that Jesus secured atonement definitely through His death and resurrection. He “secured” the elect’s salvation; He did not merely “offer” salvation for man to choose or reject.

With Calvinism’s “definite” or “limited atonement” in mind, “the world” of John 3:16 becomes a problem for them in manifesting unity with Scripture. Jesus’ sacrificial death seems here to be offered for the world, not a limited number in the world. Some Calvinists try to solve their dilemma by bringing into the discussion the eschatological “post-millennial” doctrine. This doctrine teaches the world will become more and more united with the teaching of righteousness through Jesus Christ as the Gospel is preached world-wide. Therefore “the world” Jesus foresees is the converted world which ushers in the millennial rule of Jesus on earth. According to the argument, the world will be comprised of mainly, if not only, the elect.

Attaching another complicated doctrine to Jesus’ words is

not needed. It also contradicts the context of Jesus’ words. Jesus is speaking of the world He has already entered, not the one He is to enter centuries later. Jesus says, *“For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him”* (John 3:17). It is the world that Jesus has already entered, to whom He offers saving light (John 3:19, John 12:46).

It is clear from other passages that Jesus died for all the world. However, only those who believe and continue to follow Jesus will have eternal life. Jesus, through His blood, is *“the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”* (1 John 2:2). Jesus *“is the Savior of all men, specially of them that believe”* (1 Timothy 4:9).

Jesus’ blood was shed to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29), It is sufficient to save the whole world. Jesus is sufficient light for all the world to see, and come to for salvation. But only those who heed the call of the Gospel in belief and obedience will be saved (Mark 16:15-16). When we preach the Gospel to the world, we believe Jesus died for the whole world, and sincerely offer salvation to all.