

## **DOES GOD LOVE EVERYONE?**

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There was a Royal Wedding a week ago today ... Prince Harry and Miss Meghan Markle.

Some estimates suggested it was watched by 2 billion people.

It was quite an event. Beautiful weather — 1,000 year old castle — the wedding was attended by a number of famous celebrities — plus lots of Royals — a mass of colour ... pomp and pageantry.

Hopefully the young couple will have a successful marriage! The ceremony was the easy part!

One of the more talked-about episodes from the day was the sermon given by the “Rev” Michael Curry. From the USA — he’s a bishop who heads up the Episcopal Church.

By British standards ... “Rev” Curry gave a fairly lively message. It raised quite a few eyebrows.

It was all about THE POWER OF LOVE.

In part ... the message was appropriate. It focused on the young couple ... joking that “a young couple fell in love and we all turned up” (referring to the 600 guests).

However ... much of his message related to the “power of love” more generally.

He quoted Dr Martin Luther King — who had said “We must discover the power of love ... and when we do we will make of this old world a new world, for love is the only way”.

Mr Curry continued: "Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in human history. A movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world".

Mr Curry continues:

"Imagine this tired old world where love is the way.

"When love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in the world ever again.

"When love is the way, poverty will become history.

"When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.

"When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields.

"When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters, children of God. My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world, a new human family ..."

Some people liked his message. Others didn't like it in the slightest.

In summary: ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE. God is Love ... God loves all ...when we love each other too ... we will create a new heaven and new earth. God's love for mankind is unconditional.

It reminds me of the US TV evangelist who talks a great deal of God's "Unconditional Love and Grace". It's a very popular topic with many churches... THE LOVE OF GOD ... THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF GOD.

One of their popular sayings is: "there is nothing you can do to make God love you less ...nothing you can do to make God love you more".

Many churches believe and preach what is almost a "Gospel of Love".

"The Bible teaches 'God so loved the world'. So won't you receive the Love of Jesus in you life?"

That pretty much is their key message.

Listening to Mr Curry ... and reading many of the favourable articles ... reminded me of how much the Love of God for mankind is misunderstood.

I'd like to refresh our understanding over the next week or two ... we're going to come across this misunderstanding quite often. It's almost universal.

What we'll see is that the preaching of the Love of God is for believers ... only. They'll understand the Love of God ... and value it. The world can't grasp it. So it's not really a topic that should be preached to them. It's almost an example of casting pearls before swine.

They need a different message.

A couple of Mr Curry's comments are fairly widely held and preached by many churches — that God loves everyone unconditionally ... and ... that we're all brothers and sisters. Let's start there.

#### **John 8:38-44 (NKJV)**

38 **I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.** (They had a different father than Jesus had ... they weren't his brothers and sisters)

39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.

40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

41 **You do the deeds of your father.**"

Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

42 Jesus said to them, "**If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.**

43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.

44 **You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.** When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (The devil was the father of these religious people)

Jesus said that their father was the devil! ... not God The Father. They were not Jesus' brothers and sisters ... children of God!

#### **Matthew 12:46-50 (NKJV)**

46 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him.

47 Then one said to Him, "**Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.**"

48 But **He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"**

49 And **He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!**

50 For **whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.**"

Those who obey the Father are Jesus' brethren.

Remember the parable of the wheat and the tares? The wheat and tares are not brothers and sister. The tares were sown by the devil. Not all are the same! They don't have the same father.

#### **John 17:20 (NKJV)**

20 "**I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;**

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES AND FOR US BELIEVERS.

#### **John 17:9 (NKJV)**

9 "**I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.**

Jesus does not pray for the world. He's praying for believers.

Jesus doesn't pray for everyone ... doesn't class everyone as brothers/sisters ... identifies some as the tares of the devil. Does He love everyone ... unconditionally?

#### **Psalms 5:5 (NKJV)**

5 The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;

**You hate all workers of iniquity.**

**Psalms 5:5 (NLT)**

5 **Therefore, the proud may not stand in your presence,**

**for you hate all who do evil.**

So ... is God's love unconditional? No. It says that He hates all who do evil.

**Hosea 9:15 (NKJV)**

15 **"All their wickedness is in Gilgal, (a lot of bad things are associated with 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.**

If you had unconditional love ... then you couldn't hate them! God hates those who practice lawlessness.

People try to wriggle around some of these verses that show God's condemnation of the wicked people. "Well ... God hates the sin ... but loves the sinner". That's not in the Bible — that comes from Mahatma Gandhi (it is Hindu philosophy).

But ... doesn't the Bible say that God is Love? The Apostle John makes some references ... perhaps the most popular:

**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.**

Jesus own words ... God love the whole world ... so very much.

Famous! The only scripture that some people know!

It appears in hundreds of places ... sports games (at least in the USA) ... bumper stickers ... tee shirts.

It is said to be the MOST TRANSLATED SENTENCE IN THE WHOLE WORLD.

But ... as we'll see ... there is more to this verse than meets the eye.

Question: Does the Bible itself show us that the Love of God ... and the public preaching to the world of the Love of God is the main message of the Bible? The No.1 priority?

Is it true that if you preach the Love of God ... you don't really need anything else?

It is a surprise to many people that the Love of God is hardly mentioned at all in the entire Bible!

Genesis = 0 Exodus = 1 Leviticus = 0 Numbers = 0 Deuteronomy = 1 Joshua/Judges/Ruth/1 & 2 Samuel/1 & 2 Kings/1 & 2 Chronicles = 0 etc. (Half of the OT contains 2 references to the Love of God) Isaiah = 1 Jeremiah = 1 Ezekiel = 1 Daniel = 0

"Of course" some would say. "That is the harsh God of the Old Testament! It is very different in the New Testament now that Grace has come".

Matthew = 0 Mark = 0 Luke = 0 (a few in John) Acts = 0 (and Acts records the public ministry and evangelism of the Apostles!!)

There are maybe a dozen references until we get near to the end of The Bible.

Altogether ... maybe 35-40 references in the whole Bible? Approximately 1 in 1,000 verses. Mostly in John's writings ... and when the Love of God is mentioned ... it's addressed to believers ... to the likes of you and me.

The Love of God is not a message for the world. It's Pearls before swine?

There are two typical responses to a Gospel of "The Love of God".

1. If God loves us all ... unconditionally and nothing we can do would make Him love us less ... then I'll live just how I want to ... and God will love me anyway and I'll go to heaven when I die.
2. If there really was a God who loves everyone ... and if He had all power ... He wouldn't allow the sickness/disease/war/suffering that we see all

around us. So there cannot be such a being. He doesn't exist. There is no God of Love ... there is no God at all! We are just people making our way through a horrible world.

Let's have a closer look at the key verse behind the Gospel of Love ... John 3:16.

### **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.***

It is often read as God "so..o..o..o very much" loved the world.

Loved being understood as in our modern culture ... "fond of, attracted to". A soft ... sentimental type of love (not unlike "I love my dog" or "I love pizza"). That is not what Agape means.

Some conclude: If God is fond of us all ... so very much ... He'd never do anything hurtful to us ... like send us to hell ... especially if we're just ordinary nice people. God likes us so very very much.

However "so" in this verse does not mean "so very much". In Greek: "**Houto**" meaning "**in this manner ... thus ... in this way**".

In what manner? We need the context!

Verse 16 starts with "For". A conjunction! Because of what we've just said (in verses 14-15). We can't understand verse 16 without reading verses 14 and 15.

You can't understand verse 16 without considering the earlier verses.

"In this manner" means: "According to the manner of verses 14-15".

God loved the world the way He showed in verses 14-15.

### **John 3:14-15 (NKJV)**

14 **And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (in like manner must the Son of Man be lifted up)***  
15 ***that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.***

Nicodemus wants to know if Jesus is the prophesied Messiah.

“As the serpent was lifted up ... even so (Houto) ... must Jesus be lifted up”.

What’s this all about?

### **Numbers 21:4-10 (NKJV)**

The Bronze Serpent

4 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.

5 **And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.”**

6 **So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.** (*Fiery serpents = judgment for sin ... many died*)

7 **Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us.”** So Moses prayed for the people.

8 **Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.”**

9 **So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.**

There were “fiery serpents” ... the judgment for sin ... and many died. The people “repented” and asked God to take away the judgment. God didn’t!

The serpents remained ... judgment (death would continue). There was no automatic salvation. The penalty was not removed.

Unless.

You accept God’s words and instructions ... take action ... walk across the camp ... and gaze at the uplifted serpent.

If you didn’t obey ... you died!



And in this way ... this manner ... John 3:16 ... tells us God “loved the world”.

Today ... God has not removed the death penalty for sin.

But ... as people looked to the bronze serpent in Moses’ day ... now ... rather than dying ... they can look to Jesus.

God demonstrated His love (agape) to Ancient Israel by giving them a way of escape. Look at (Hebrew: Look intently ... gaze at) the bronze serpent.

In the same way ... “Thus” — “So, in this way” — God gave His son to be lifted up ... that those who look to Him ... gaze on Him ... can escape the judgment for sin.

Back to John Chapter 3.

#### **John 3:14-16 (NKJV)**

14 **And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*, (even so = thus in the same manner)**

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

16 **For God (in this manner) so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

It is popular to focus on the Love of God ... and the good news.

But ... only if you believe! If you don’t believe in Jesus ... the judgment remains ... and you will perish.

Perish = Greek: “Apollumi” = to destroy! (Herod sought to destroy the baby Jesus. Greek: Apollumi).

So John 3:16 has a message of ultimate total destruction if you don’t look to Jesus!

Somehow ... that gets overlooked.

Continue in John Chapter 3.

**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.”***

The unbeliever is condemned. You can't just pick out the first few words of verse 16.

**John 3:36 (NKJV)**

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 on him.”***

He who does not believe has the wrath of God hovering over them.

People can't just take half a verse out of context.

Notice also the tenses in John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world” = past tense ... “that He gave” = past tense.

This is recording an event in the past (for us ... 2,000 years ago).

Most seem to read this in the present tense ... “God so very very much loves the world”. “He loves us all today ... and could never do anything unpleasant to the world ... or judge it”.

Often people also change the tense of “believes”.

John 3:16 says “Whoever believes in Him” — present tense ... whoever “is believing in Him” ... whoever “continues to believe in Him” shall not perish.

Lots of churches teach the “once saved always saved” heresy. They read verse 16 as:

“For God so loves the world ... that whosoever (once upon a time) believed on Jesus ... has already got eternal life”.

Having believed something in the past isn't good enough.

It's he who believes ... and continues to believe ... who will not perish.

“Believes in Him” (Greek: Into Jesus). Not just “believe” about Jesus ... a good man ... but believes in Him as Lord and Master and Saviour. He's the boss ... He's in charge ... when He gives us commandments ... they're to be obeyed.

So ... God in His Agape love ... made provision 2,000 years ago ... that those who believe and continue to believe on His Son who was lifted up like the bronze serpent ... that they will not perish.

Those who don't believe ...and don't continue to believe In Jesus ... will perish. God's wrath hovers over them.

So ... NO ... John 3:16 is not a message to this selfish sinful world that God loves them all just as they are ... and they're all going to heaven when they die. That's not what scripture says.

We need John 3:14-15 to understand John 3:16. People will remain under the judgment of death ... until they look to Jesus ... and believe in Him ... as Israel looked to God's provision in the bronze serpent.

If you don't believe in Jesus ... it is abundantly clear ... you will perish.