

Does God Love the Whole World? Election & John 3:16

Introduction

As Primitive, Original Baptists we strive to uphold the teachings of the original church as we see presented in the New Testament scriptures. One of the distinctive doctrines that we find in the scriptures that Primitive Baptists uphold is the doctrine of “unconditional election”. When some people first hear of the doctrine of election, I have seen it cause a good deal of anxiety and confusion when this doctrine is not properly understood. One of the first rebuttals I will usually hear against election is that “God could not have chosen a people to salvation before the world began because John 3:16 says that God loves the whole world and offers salvation to any that will believe in Jesus Christ.” It is true that John 3:16 does say that God loves the world. However, we will consider the rightly dividing of that verse in context to see that Jesus is not teaching Nicodemus that God loves everyone without exception, but that God loves the world without distinction, particularly that God has a people outside the natural Jewish nation among the Gentiles. I believe we will see that John 3:16 is not an invitation to eternal life to anyone that is willing to believe, but that verse is an assurance text to all that do believe that they already have eternal life through Jesus Christ. We want to have a thorough discussion together of how to properly reconcile the doctrine of unconditional election with the verse in John 3:16. We hope you can read this article with an open mind, considering the scriptures referenced, and study these things out for yourself to see if these things are so. *“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.”* (2 Tim. 2:7)

What is Unconditional Election?

It is common for some people to get nervous or afraid when they first hear of God’s unconditional election of a people to salvation. This fear or anxiety is simply due to a lack of understanding of what election really means. Therefore, what is “Unconditional Election”? Election simply means “the act of picking out or choosing”. The Bible teaches that God’s choice of a people to salvation in election is not based upon their performance of a work or action, but the reason for God’s election is his own free and sovereign grace. Therefore, election is “unconditional” for the recipients of eternal life. God made his unconditional choice of a people to salvation “before the foundation of the world”, long before any of our works or belief could initiate God’s choice. *“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”* (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13) Some people might question if “election” is actually even taught in the Bible. A significant part of the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles must be denied if one denies the doctrine of election. Election was clearly taught by Jesus Christ – Luke 18:7; Matt. 24:22,24,31; Mark 13:20,22,27. Election was clearly taught by the Apostle Paul – Rom. 8:33; Rom. 9:11; Rom. 11:5,28; 1 Thess. 1:4; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1. Election was clearly taught by the Apostle Peter – 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Pet. 5:13; 2 Pet. 1:10. Election was also taught by the Apostle John – 2 John 1,13. In summary, anyone that denies that “election” is a true biblical doctrine has to ignore a significant portion of the New Testament scriptures.

Since we see from the scriptures that God did choose out and elect a people to salvation, we must ask what was the basis of God’s election? How or why did God elect a people to save? Some might acknowledge the doctrine of election in scripture, but then try to characterize it as a “conditional election”, that God chose those who he knew would later choose him. God’s election of a people to salvation was not based upon who would later do good or choose to accept Christ (not based on any foreseen merit in the life of a man). Then, no man would have been chosen because of the depth of man’s depravity. God did look out over all mankind in his perfect omniscience to see if any would choose him, but what he found was that there is “none that doeth good, no, not one”. The scriptures show that if God chose those who would

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ultimately choose him, then no one would be elected because no one can do good, understand, or seek God in our nature without God first changing our nature in the new birth. "2) *The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.* 3) *They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*" (Ps. 14:2-3) God did not conditionally elect those who he knew would later believe, but God deemed all of mankind unworthy of his love. God chose to freely bestow his love upon a group of elect people, according to his own free and sovereign grace.

Therefore, God's election and choice of a people to salvation is not based upon their works (because Ps. 14:2-3 affirms that then no one would have been chosen), but instead God's election is by "grace", by God's "unmerited favor" (2 Tim. 1:9, Eph. 2:8-9). Notice in Rom. 11:6 that grace and works are wholly opposed and incompatible with each other. If election (God's choice) is of grace, then, by definition, it cannot be of works. "5) *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.* 6) *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more of grace: otherwise work is no more work.* 7) *What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*" (Rom. 11:5-7) Grace is "unmerited favor", but if an action of man is required to be performed to cause "grace" to be bestowed upon an individual, then it is no longer "grace" but "wages" because a work or action has been performed that has now "merited" favor being shown unto you. This is why grace and works are incompatible. When one performs a work that causes a good action to be done unto them, what has occurred is now "merited favor" rather than grace that requires the good work to be "unmerited" in the recipient.

God uses the example of his sovereign choice to bestow favor upon Jacob and to love Jacob in the Old Testament as an example of God's sovereignty in choosing an elect people to save. Jacob had not even been born yet when God pronounced him as the chosen or preferred son, so God's election of Jacob could not have been based on his future good works. In turn, God's elect people were chosen before the foundation of the world, before they even had the possibility of doing any good works to merit their choosing by God. "11) *(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth;),* 12) *It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.* 13) *As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*" (Rom. 9:11-13) Both Jacob and Esau were guilty sinners justly condemned to the penalty of sin. Both Jacob and Esau were undeserving sinners with no merit to have been chosen by God. Of those two totally unworthy sinners, God in his sovereign election saw fit to love Jacob and to pass over Esau in his fallen condition. Due to our sin, all of mankind is naturally worthy of God's hatred because God hates sin and cannot even look upon sin. God did not choose to further harm Esau by not choosing to love him. Esau was already in a fallen sinful state and justly condemned to God's wrath and judgment and hatred because of his sin. Jacob in his nature was worthy of that same condemnation and judgment, but by nothing more than his own love and grace, God saw fit to choose to love Jacob.

With both Jacob and Esau as wretched sinners unworthy of God's love and election, the real question then is how could God elect and love Jacob who also worked iniquity in his life? Was Jacob loved by God because he did good works and chose to accept God? No, Jacob lived a very scandalous life prior to his experience with God at Bethel in Genesis 28. Jacob deceived Esau into selling his birthright, he lied and deceived his father to receive the eldest son's blessing, and then when Esau found out, he had to flee his father's house to preserve his life. Jacob was just as guilty before God as Esau in his own works, but in spite of all that, God chose to love Jacob anyway. God chose to love Jacob. "*The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil that that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth.*" (Rom. 9:11) God chose (elected) to love Jacob before he was born, not based upon his works but based upon God's grace, his unmerited favor shown unto undeserving Jacob.

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Why did God choose to love Jacob? Because it was according to God's own good will and purpose to show mercy and compassion to Jacob. *"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."* (Rom. 9:15-16) Jacob was not loved by God by his own will or works, but he was saved and loved according to God's sovereign purpose to show mercy unto him. He was just as undeserving of God's mercy as Esau, but according to God's compassion, he amazingly saw fit to love the supplanter, Jacob.

The elect were not chosen because of any merit in themselves (just like Jacob's total unworthiness) but were chosen simply because of God's love for them. *"7) The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: 8) But because the Lord loved you..."* (Deut. 7:7-8) *"4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved);"* (Eph. 2:4-5) *"15) For he saith unto Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."* (Rom. 9:15-16) God is sovereign and has the right to choose whom he sees fit. The elect have been chosen by God's sovereign will and purpose. *"4) According as he hath chosen us in him...5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."* (Eph. 1:4-6) God chose the elect because it seemed good in his sight to do so. *"25) I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. 26) Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."* (Matt. 11:25-26) God would be just to not choose anyone because no one deserved to be elected. Thankfully, because of God's grace, mercy, and love, God chose a vast, innumerable host of people to love and to save to heaven by the death of Jesus Christ.

Some people have been offended by the truth that God would choose to love Jacob and leave Esau in the ruined condition he was already in. They say it was "not fair" to choose Jacob and not to choose Esau. God did not injure or punish Esau any more by choosing Jacob. He simply left Esau exactly where he was already. The chosen one received additional blessings, but the non-chosen one did not get worse punishment. Think about God's choice of an elect people in regards to the choice of a bride by a husband. When the husband chooses his bride to covenant to marry, he does not injure all the rest of the women in the world. No, he leaves them right where they were already. Instead, he chooses to bestow his special love and affection upon a woman that he loves. We commend a husband for choosing out a wife to love and cherish above all others in this world, but we blame God as being unfair for not choosing everyone in election? Is the husband wrong to choose to bestow his special love upon one lady for the rest of his life? No, certainly not. Jesus Christ as our Beloved Husband chose out a bride to love before the foundation of the world. This elect bride was not worthy of his love, but Jesus still loved his bride by his own free and sovereign grace. Therefore, God did not add any additional injury or punishment to Esau by not choosing him. God left Esau right where he was: sinful, ruined, and condemned. Instead, God just added abundant blessings to Jacob and his bride by choosing them. Let us thank God for choosing his bride to save, even though there was no merit in that bride for salvation.

Rightly Dividing "World" in the Scriptures

We have discussed unconditional election, and hopefully, you can see that the scriptures do teach God's unconditional choice of his people to salvation. However, many people struggle reconciling the truth of election with the thought that "God loved the world" from John 3:16. How can God only love the elect if that

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scripture says that God loved the world? We will discuss the appropriate rightly dividing of that wording in John 3:16 as we go on. First, let us see in scripture that we have to determine exactly what “world” means in any given verse depending on the immediate context. We will see that “world” is used in a multitude of ways in scripture and rarely in context does that word mean all of mankind without exception. Therefore, we must study the immediate context of each verse and rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) to determine the appropriate group of people under consideration when we see “world” in the scriptures.

The Greek word for “world” in John 3:16 is “*kosmos*” which means “orderly arrangement; by implication the world (in a wide or narrow sense) including its inhabitants literally or figuratively” (Strong’s). We will see that the group of people under consideration by “world” can be in a “wide or narrow sense” depending on the context and rarely means all mankind without exception. Let’s consider a few uses of this word world in scripture. Jesus came into the world, and “*the world knew him not*” (John 1:10). The majority of the world in darkness rejected Jesus, but there were obviously many disciples who knew him and believed in him. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus was the Lamb that would take away the “*sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus did not take away the sin of all mankind (only the elect), otherwise, there would be no one to go to hell since their sins have been put away and paid for fully by Jesus Christ. Jesus said “*if the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*” (John 15:18) Clearly every person in the world did not hate the disciples or Jesus Christ. However, “world” is used many times in scripture to describe the fallen world system apart from God’s grace. Many uses of world are figuratively describing “the world apart from God” and not describing individual people or all people in the world.

In his final prayer with the disciples, Jesus Christ actually affirmed he was not praying for the world but only praying for his elect given him out of the world. “*I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.*” (John 17:9) It is interesting that here Jesus didn’t pray for “the world” that he supposedly loves every person in the world without exception. Instead of praying for the whole world, Jesus only prays for those given unto him out of the world, or specially for the elect given unto him. “*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*” (1 John 5:19) Even in the same verse here, we see a qualification to the “whole world”. The whole world without exception does not lie in wickedness because “we are of God”. There is a remnant in the world faithful to God, but the majority of the world is against the Lord and his Christ. Paul commended the Roman church because “*your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*” (Rom. 1:8). It is obvious that every person in the “whole world” was not speaking of the faith of the Romans. Rather, Paul uses this all-inclusive language to convey that their faith was widely known and commended in the context of all the churches and disciples of Christ at that time. This Greek word “*kosmos*” is found 152 times in the New Testament, and if you do a word search of each usage, you will see this one word has a variety of different applications depending on the context and very few times does it mean all of mankind without exception. Therefore, we can see that just because we see that “God loved the world” in John 3:16, that does not automatically mean that God loves all mankind without exception. We will consider the appropriate rightly dividing of the context of “the world” in John 3:16 in a later section.

Is There Anyone the Lord Hates?

The majority of Christianity today believes that God loves everyone from John 3:16, and then you have to do something (believe, accept, pray, good works, etc.) to be saved and go to heaven. It is quite offensive to most of Christianity to uphold the scriptural truth of election that teaches that God does not love everyone. Therefore, we need to consider, do the scriptures teach that God loves everyone? Or does the word of God affirm that Jesus Christ justly hates some of mankind? A reading of John 3:16 in isolation might appear to teach that God loves the entire world without exception. However, as we study the word of God and

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compare scripture with scripture, line upon line, precept upon precept, we see there are some people in this world that God simply does not love.

As we have already discussed in God's choice of Jacob and passing over Esau, we find that "*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*" (Rom. 9:13). This statement is quoted from and further clarified in Malachi that God did not simply "love Esau less", as is commonly believed. No, Esau and his wicked people (representing the non-elect), those are "*the people against whom the Lord hath indignation forever*" (Mal. 1:2-4). Therefore, since God hated Esau and hates the wicked, he simply could not love the entire world without exception. Let us consider quite a few characteristics of people that God hates. God is love (1 John 4:8); God loves righteousness, but he also hates iniquity (Ps. 45:7). Therefore, God hates all the workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5). God hates the wicked and those that love violence (Ps. 11:5). God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). The sacrifice, the way, and the thoughts of the wicked are all an abomination before the Lord (Prov. 15:8,9,26). God hates those who exhibit a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that run to mischief, a false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among the brethren (Prov. 6:16-19). God is a God of love, but he's also holy and righteous; he hates those who work iniquity and wickedness in disobedience to his holy law. We see that we cannot study and rightly divide the whole counsel of God in scripture and conclude that God loves everyone without exception.

How Can Anyone Be Separated from Christ's Love?

If God loves the entire world, will Jesus Christ send some that he loves to hell? Since there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39), if God loves the whole world, then that means there are some that Jesus Christ still loves that he will send to the lake of fire at the last day. God forbid! It is evident from scripture that not everyone will be in heaven at the end of time. If Jesus Christ loved the whole world, then will there be some in the lake of fire who Jesus loved? If Jesus no longer loves those who are sent to the lake of fire, what separated them from the love of Jesus Christ? There is nothing in this life that can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39), and that includes any unbelief or sin that we can commit during our lives here. The majority of Christianity believes that Jesus Christ loves the whole world, but if you don't believe in Jesus or do some other good work prior to your death, that Jesus will then hate you and send you to hell. God forbid! Unbelief is a sin, but Jesus came to save us from our sins (not every sin but unbelief). Jesus' blood saves us from our unbelief in our lives as well. If Jesus loved the entire world, but then our unbelief caused that love to be removed from someone and them cast into hell, that undermines not just the character of God, but the efficacy of Jesus Christ's death on the cross. God cannot change (Mal. 3:6). God cannot love someone today and not love them tomorrow. God's love is an "everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3), which naturally means that his love "lasts forever". God's love cannot change towards anyone; his love is eternal. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). Every one that God has loved, he will always love because God loves his elect the same way he loved his Son. "*Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me...for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*" (John 17:23-24) If Jesus loved the whole world but then the whole world that he loved does not end up in heaven, then the promise of God has been compromised, and they have separated from the love of God. God forbid!

Jesus came into the world to save "his people" (not the whole world) from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Jesus promised that he would not lose any of those that were given to him to save on the cross. The will of God the Father was for Jesus to not lose one of those that were given to him (John 6:39, 10:26-29), and Jesus performed perfectly the will of the Father (John 8:29). The eternal will of God cannot be overruled (Dan. 4:34-35), and everything that God purposes will be accomplished (Isaiah 14:24). Jesus promised the sheep that were given to him by the Father that none of them shall perish, without the loss of a single one (John

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10:27-29). God cannot fail or be discouraged (Isaiah 42:4). If you contend that Jesus loved and died for the whole world, but then just one of those little children end up in hell, then Jesus has failed in his promise of eternal security for all he died for on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, every one for whom he shed his blood was “perfected forever” (Heb. 10:14). The sins for all for whom Jesus died were forgiven by his blood (Eph. 1:7). Every drop of Jesus’ blood was shed to atone for a specific sin that had been (or would be) committed by those for whom he died. The amount of blood shed by Jesus perfectly equaled the sin sacrifice that was required to atone for the entirety of all their sins. Jesus is our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14). The Old Testament high priest went into the holiest of holies on the day of atonement to represent God’s people and offer blood sacrifice on the mercy seat for sin. Do you think Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest did not know exactly whom he was shedding his blood for? Or worse yet, some of the blood on the mercy seat was shed in vain? Jesus did not die and shed his blood for the entire world because if one for which Jesus shed his blood ends up in hell, then the blood of Jesus has failed in the work of salvation. God forbid!

We see that every one for which Christ loved and died for has to be exact same definite group that will be with God in heaven at the end of time. Otherwise, the immutability, love, sovereignty, and success of our Lord is called into question. Look at all the dreadful consequences that arise when one says that Jesus loved and died for the whole world, but the whole world will not be with God in heaven at the end of time. A) Those in hell have been separated from God’s love (because God’s love could never enter hell, so his love would have to be withdrawn). B) God has changed because he did love them, but now he doesn’t love them anymore. C) God has been made a liar because Jesus said he would not lose any that were given Him, but He did lose some or possibly many. D) God has been made to fail because he purposed to save but couldn’t save them; Christ’s blood failed to save one for whom it was shed. E) God’s sovereignty has been overthrown because he desired to save someone he loved but failed in the execution of his will. F) A portion of Jesus’ blood of Jesus has been shed in vain and wasted because the blood was shed for the purpose of cleansing this person’s sin, but it was not cleansed. We see the character, success, and sovereignty of our perfect God is impugned when we believe that Jesus loved and died for the whole world but did not actually save the whole world. Instead, the proper biblical doctrine of unconditional election teaches that Jesus was a perfect success in saving all his people (all the elect) he came to save on the cross.

Limited Atonement – Limited by What?

Jesus Christ died for on the cross and justified a number less than all of humanity. There are some that believe in a “universal atonement” – that Christ died for and saved every person that has or ever will live, without exception. All that Jesus loved and died for have been saved, so if Jesus loved and died for all of mankind without exception, then all men have already been saved by Christ to spend eternity in heaven. Jesus promised that all that were given to him by the Father would have everlasting life and none of them would ever perish (John 6:37-40, 10:27-29). That definite group is saved to heaven, and if Jesus was given the entire world without exception on the cross, then the entire world has been “universally atoned”. If you believe that Jesus loved and died for the whole world, you must also believe in a universal atonement. However, we find at the end of time, there is a group of people who will be banished from God’s presence into the lake of fire for eternity (Rev. 20:11-15, Matt. 25:31-46, 2 Thess. 1:8-9), so the scriptures deny a “universal atonement”.

Any person who doesn’t believe all of mankind will be in heaven actually adheres to a “limited atonement” view of the work of Christ. Therefore, there are only two causes of the limitation of Christ’s atonement, either by: A) the choice of man or B) the choice of God. If salvation is limited by the work or choice of man,

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then salvation is actually limited by the “effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice”. If Jesus died for the whole world but did not actually “atone” for their sins because man did not perform a work (belief, acceptance, prayer, etc.) to complete the transaction, then it is actually man that limits the atonement of the death of Christ. If Jesus loved and died for all mankind, but yet all of those for whom he promised to save do not inherit eternal life in heaven, we are forced to conclude: A) That God has failed in His purpose and intent to save; (but God cannot fail nor be discouraged, Isaiah 42:4, Eccl. 3:14). B) That God’s sovereign will has been overruled; (but none can stay the hand of God, or resist the will of God, Dan. 4:35, Is. 14:24, Rom. 9:19-23). C) That God has been made a liar; God promised eternal life (Titus 1:2) before the world began, but he couldn’t deliver it; Jesus proclaimed to the Father that he finished the work of salvation (John 17:4, 19:30), but he made a false profession, but God and Jesus Christ cannot lie, Titus 1:2, Heb. 6:18, Ps. 89:35.

On the other hand, which is the option that the scriptures actually affirm, salvation is limited by the “extent of God’s choice”, so the atonement was restricted by God’s unconditional, sovereign election. The scriptures do not support that God loves all of mankind without exception as we have already seen in the scriptures above. Therefore, the limitation of the atonement by Christ’s death is limited to those that God chose to love, elect, and predestinate – a group of persons that is less than all of mankind, but a group that is both definite and particular in nature. *“As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”* (John 17:2) The same group that God elected, foreknew, and predestinated is the same definite group (not universal) that will be “called” (or born again), “justified” (by the blood of Christ), and “glorified” (remade into the divine body of Jesus), Rom. 8:29-30. The character of God revealed in scripture emphasizes that Jesus did not, and could not, fail in his salvation of sinners and atonement for sin. Since all men without exception are not saved to heaven, then we must conclude that the atonement that Christ procured on the cross was limited in nature, but yet still definite and particular in scope. Christ died for all that were given to him by the Father (John 6:37-39, 10:28-29, 17:2). Christ died for “his people” (Matt. 1:21, Ps. 111:9). Christ died for “his sheep” (John 10:11-15, Matt. 25:32). Christ died for “the church” (Acts 20:28, Eph. 5:25). Christ came to die for a vast multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue (Rev. 7:9). Jesus came to save, and he did save the elect. Jesus testified to the Father that the work of salvation was complete – *“It is finished”* (John 19:30).

Rightly Dividing John 3:16 in Context

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Who then is “the world” that God “so loved” to send his only begotten Son to die for their sins that they would have eternal life? John 3:16 is not teaching that God loved the entire world without exception. As we have considered, that cannot be the case because the scriptures teach that there are some that God hates. Furthermore, God cannot change (Mal. 3:6); God cannot lie (Titus 1:2); God’s love is everlasting (Jer. 31:3), and there is nothing that can separate anyone from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). If God loved the entire world without exception, there is nothing that can separate them from God’s love, and they will all be in heaven with the Lord. Since we know all the world will not be in heaven, it’s evident that God did not love the entire world without exception. Instead, this verse is teaching that God loved a vast, diverse group of people for Christ to save, a group far beyond just the Jewish nation.

Jesus delivered this statement in verse 16 in the midst of his conversation with Nicodemus who questions Jesus by night from John 3:1-21. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus, like almost all Jews at that time in the first century, believed that God only loved the natural-born, circumcised lineage of the Jews. They viewed all non-Jews as dogs, unclean, and certainly unworthy of God’s love. However,

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Jesus is giving Nicodemus a revelation that God's family is much broader and more diverse than just the natural-born lineage of the Jews. God doesn't just love "the Jews", but God loves "the world", including the Gentiles. God's family is "*out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*" (Rev. 5:9, 7:9). It's as if Jesus is attempting to teach Nicodemus the same lesson that Peter learned when he preached to Cornelius, a Gentile. Previously, Peter (a devout natural-born Jew) was proud of the fact that he had never defiled himself with anything common or unclean (including interaction with the Gentiles). Then, God showed him that the elect family of God is not just comprised of only Jews but includes "the world of the Gentiles" as well. Peter declares what Jesus was trying to teach Nicodemus by saying that God loves "the world", even including the Gentiles out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue. "*And Peter opened his mouth and said Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.*" (Acts 10:34-35) Jesus and Peter affirm that salvation is not determined by ethnic lineage but by the work of the Holy Spirit in fearing God and working righteousness among the children of God. Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that God loves "all men without distinction", not all men without exception. "*There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*" (Col. 3:11)

The "whosoever believeth" in John 3:16 is not the means of the world gaining "everlasting life". God does not offer an "opt-in" policy to everlasting life for "whosoever" chooses to believe. This verse is not an invitation to gain everlasting life; it is rather an assurance text for those who believe and already have everlasting life. Anyone who wants to – a general "whosoever" – cannot just choose to believe on Jesus. Only those who are already born again can believe on Jesus (John 5:24; 1 John 5:1). The only "whosoever" that can believe on Christ are those elect children of God that have already been born again. Therefore, this verse is not offering eternal life to "whosoever" chooses to believe on Christ, but this verse offers assurance to the believer in Christ that Jesus died for their sins and that they already have eternal life.

Let us look at the broader context of John 3. The main topic of Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus in their conversation is about "the new birth". One must be born again to see and enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5). We cannot change our nature to be born again ourselves (John 3:6). We see the effects of the new birth like the wind blowing where it listeth (John 3:8). Essentially, Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that he can see the effects of the new birth – see the effects of the wind blowing in one's heart (v.8) – not only among Jews, but you can see the effects of the wind of the new birth blowing among "whosoever believeth" (among any person without distinction, lineage, or ethnicity). God does not only love the natural-born Jews, but God loves the entire "world" without distinction of ethnicity or any other metric.

Notice the comparison that Jesus gives Nicodemus for "whosoever believeth" from the Old Testament. "*14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. 15) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" (John 3:14-15) Nicodemus, being a studious Jew and Pharisee, undoubtedly knew well the story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. Jesus compares His purpose in the world – to be lifted up for the salvation of his people – to the serpent in the wilderness, so maybe Nicodemus would go study up on the story of the serpent to understand Jesus' purpose in the world. In Num. 21:4-9, we see an account where the people of Israel grumbled against Moses, and as a judgment, God sends fiery serpents to afflict the people. God then calls Moses to make a brazen serpent that "whosoever looketh" upon this brazen serpent would be saved from their serpent bite. First of all, who are the "whosoever" that were called to look on this serpent? God did not invite the entire world to look on this serpent for salvation; God did not call the Assyrians or Egyptians or any other Gentile nation to look upon this serpent for deliverance. Who are the "whosoever" called to look upon this serpent? It was the chosen people of God who were still alive (some had died already) who had the ability to look upon it. Those people of God who were alive had a choice to look upon a serpent and receive deliverance from losing their natural life.

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Did God offer the Israelites a chance to go to heaven by believing and looking on the serpent? No, he offered those who already had life deliverance from a painful sting of sin in their life, and to not physically die. There was no offer of eternal life in heaven given to those who believed. There was only temporal, natural deliverance from the sting and penalty of sin when they believed. In like manner, we see from Jesus' lesson, the only people who can look upon Jesus and believe in faith are God's chosen people who are already born again, who already have life. This Old Testament lesson of the brazen serpent being lifted up once again affirms that belief is not the "cause" of gaining eternal life, but an "evidence" of one whom the wind of the Spirit has already blown in their heart. The "whosoever" in context is not all the world, but just like Moses lifted up the brazen serpent, all of the world could not look on the serpent. Only the people of Israel, only those who were still alive (some had died already), and only those who chose to look on the serpent could receive deliverance from their sickness. Therefore, we see that "whosoever" is not everyone without exception, but the "whosoever wills" is only those who are the people of God who already have life in the new birth, who have the ability to look on the serpent. Notice the similar wording in Rom. 10:1-13. The "whosoever calls" (v.13) upon Christ is not an invitation to the world at large to anyone who is willing. The "whosoever" that calls upon the Lord already has a zeal of God (v.2) and already has the word of faith in their heart and mind (v.8).

God sent his Son into the world, not to save just the natural-born Jews, but to save the whole world of God's elect people, out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."* (John 3:17) Now, Jesus continues his lesson that the effects of the new birth, the wind of the Holy Spirit, can be seen blowing in all the world. Jesus no longer has to establish that believers can be all over the world, out of every ethnicity, lineage, and background. Therefore, he no longer has to distinguish who Christ came to save by national divisions. Who did Jesus come to save then? Those who believe; those who show evidence of the wind of the new birth in their life. *"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (John 3:18) Notice, one's belief does not cause them to "be condemned" or to "avoid condemnation". Instead, belief is an evidence of salvation that manifests the fact that they are already not condemned – "he that believeth on him is not condemned". Then, on the other side of the coin, those who don't believe are not condemned to hell because of their unbelief. No, their unbelief manifests they are "condemned already". Belief is simply an evidence of election, *"as many as were ordained to eternal life believed"* (Acts 13:48). Jesus once again clearly teaches that belief is the evidence of salvation, not the conditional cause of one gaining eternal life or being born again.

Then, in the very next chapter, Jesus broke Jewish protocol by going into Samaria and preaching to a Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus tells her all things that ever she did, and she runs into the city testifying of Jesus as the Messiah. Then, some Samaritans came out of the city and believed on Jesus, and said we *"know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world"* (John 4:34). These Samaritans had grown up their whole life hearing from Jews that the Messiah (the Christ) would only be the Savior of the Jewish nation. However, now that Jesus had come, these Samaritans had a realization that the Christ was not just the Savior of Jews, but he was the Savior of the "world" (Samaritans included). The Samaritans in John 4 had personally realized the same lesson that Nicodemus was being taught in John 3, that the evidences of the wind of the new birth can be seen in the entire "world" in the born-again children of God out of every nation, kindred, people, and nation. We see from Jesus' lesson to Nicodemus that God loves "the world" of his elect; not the entire world without exception, but the world without distinction, God's innumerable people out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue.

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Election Is Not Fair?

When some people first are confronted with the doctrine of election, it seems a very common reaction is that “election is not fair”. The Holy Spirit anticipated this human objection to election and gave us an inspired rebuttal in Rom. 9:19-23 that we will consider in just a moment. As humans, we naturally want to be in control of all our situations and fully in control of our fate. Therefore, when we are confronted with the truth that the most important thing in this world, our eternal salvation or damnation, is totally out of our hands, it might initially cause a good bit of fear. You are telling me that my eternal salvation is God’s choice, not my choice? You are telling me that God doesn’t love everyone and there are some he didn’t choose? I don’t have any control over my eternal salvation? No, praise God, you don’t have any control over your eternal salvation. God did give man a choice and our upright federal head, Adam, chose sin instead of obedience in the garden of Eden. We have seen where “man’s choice” got us, which is ruined and condemned in sin and death. God gave man a choice; God gave man control over his eternal fate, and he messed it up, condemning all of mankind to eternal judgment. Therefore, God took back the reins and made the choice himself to redeem his people from the sin of Adam. Trust me, we don’t want control over our eternal life. Man had that control once, and Adam plunged us into sin and death. When we have the right perspective, there is a great peace and assurance to commend our eternal life over to the God that cannot fail and cannot change, instead of with man that has already proven we can and will mess it up.

The Holy Spirit anticipated this common objection to the doctrine of election not being fair. Right after the precise discussion of the election of Jacob by nothing more than God’s grace, mercy, and compassion (Rom. 9:11-18), we see the Lord answering man’s rebuttal that God does not have the right to do as he pleases with his creation, to choose whom he pleases. *“19) Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? 20) Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21) Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”* (Rom. 9:19-21) It is very bold to charge God with fault or unrighteousness by exercising his sovereign right to choose whom he pleases to salvation. The Holy Spirit puts the objector in their place, “Who art thou that replies against God? Does the vessel have the right to question the sovereign will of the potter?” God’s answer to man is, “Remember your place; I’m God; I’m sovereign; I’m perfectly good; You are not”. We are the creation of God; we do not have the ability or the right to question the sovereignty of our Creator. We are vessels formed from the dust of the ground, and the only reason we have life is because God gave us life. Does the vessel have the right to question the potter about how it is made? No, of course not; that’s foolishness. It is foolish to envision a vessel stopping the potter’s wheel to rebuke the potter for how it is being crafted. The potter is perfectly sovereign and has the right to do as he pleases with his creation.

God is the sovereign potter in this universe and has chosen in his own will and purpose to craft some vessels unto honor and to allow some other vessels unto dishonor. God made the vessel of man both good and very good. Unfortunately, man marred God’s good vessel by choosing to sin and rebel against God in the garden. Now, in our nature, all of mankind are marred vessels, so corrupted that they are not good for anything but destruction. An eternity of judgment in the lake of fire would be the state of all of mankind if not for the love of God. Why will those that God did not elect go to the lake of fire at the end of time? Because they are sinners worthy of God’s judgment. That is the just condemnation of all of mankind in our sin. Any man that goes to judgment in hell is due to man’s sin and man’s just condemnation before God. We are prone to look at election from the wrong perspective. We want to think that God is obligated to offer everyone a chance or to choose everyone, and thus are offended that God did not choose some. Instead, when we see the radical nature of man’s corruption and depravity, we know that all of mankind should go to hell, if not for the grace of God. Man wants to rebuke God for not choosing some. The eternal mystery and miracle of grace is that God chose to save the elect at all. Man marred God’s perfect vessel, and was

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worthy of judgment. In spite of that, God still saw fit to elect, to love, and to give his only begotten Son to save a group of people out of that ruined race. We ought not charge God for unfairness for not choosing some. We ought to praise and glorify God for choosing to save his elect when he was under no obligation to save anyone! If God was not obligated to elect anyone, why did God choose a people to save? To the praise of the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:6). God elected a people to praise and glorify him for electing them. Therefore, we need to praise God for his loving, gracious election of his people to salvation, and never to question the sovereignty of God to choose his people according to his own good will and purpose.

Did God Just Elect a Few?

Another common concern when first learning about the doctrine of election is that there will just be a few elect in heaven, that God only chose a few people in election. Well, that is the exact opposite of the truth. Actually, the doctrine of election is actually the most inclusive means of eternal salvation that there is in Christianity. We might initially think that election is just a “small exclusive group”, but actually election encompasses an “innumerable inclusive group”. While election might first appear “exclusive” since God did not choose everyone, if we properly understand man’s total depravity and that no one would be saved apart from God’s grace, election is actually extremely “inclusive” because otherwise everyone would be excluded from heaven. God’s people are actually an “innumerable, diverse” group that no man can count or identify. *“After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”* (Rev. 7:9 and 5:9) God chose a people so vast that no man can number it. God’s people are so diverse that he chose at least one person “out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue”. Man’s works excludes anyone from heaven, but God’s unconditional election saves so many people, we can’t even count.

It is a great comfort to know that God’s grace extends far beyond where the local church, the gospel, or the preacher can reach. While saying that God loves everyone might appear to be very inclusive at first blush, when we see that you are only saved when someone believes in Jesus, there are many people left out of any possibility of salvation. God’s election before the foundation of the world is not limited by the waning zeal of churches and preachers that only those who hear and believe the gospel are saved. No, God’s election ensures that every child of God will be born again by the Holy Ghost at some point in their life. The wind of God’s Holy Spirit in the new birth can blow in nations that have never heard the gospel, truly in every nation, kindred, people, and tongue. A free will and belief gospel sends all those in other nations who have never confessed Jesus to hell. They are “excluded” from any possibility of going to heaven based on no fault of their own because they never heard about Jesus. Instead, the doctrine of unconditional election “includes” so many in salvation that modern Christianity condemns to hell, a vast multitude which no man can number out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue. Praise God for the vast “inclusiveness” of God’s unconditional election of his people to salvation!

What if God Did Not Choose Me?

A final concern that sometimes arises when one first hears about election is, “What if God did not choose me?” Someone says I love God, I believe in Jesus Christ, I try to do good works and love my neighbor, but what if God didn’t choose me? Well, I’m happy to tell you that those are all evidences that God DID ALREADY choose you! As we have seen from John 3:16, that verse is not an invitation to gain eternal life, but an assurance to believers of the eternal life we already have by Jesus Christ. You might be concerned there is someone out there who loves God, believes in Jesus, exhibits good works, but God didn’t choose

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them. Well, that person does not exist because those good works are all fruits of the Spirit that show evidence they were already chosen by God to salvation before the world began. If we follow the greatest commandment to love God with all our being and to love others (Matt. 22:37-39), that is evidence that God already loves us. *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19) If we love the church and we love the brethren, that is evidence we have already passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14). If we believe in Jesus, that is evidence we are already born again and already in possession of eternal life (John 5:24). Paul's confidence of the Thessalonians election – *"knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God"* – was their work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope, and belief of the gospel (1 Thess. 1:3-6).

One core difference that the proper understanding of election will give you is that what most of Christianity presents as the "causes" of eternal salvation are actually the "effects" or evidences of eternal salvation. We don't choose to love God to go to heaven. No, we love God as an evidence that we are already born again, and God loves us. We don't choose to believe or have faith to gain eternal life from Jesus Christ. No, our belief and faith are evidences of salvation and faith as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) already residing in our heart. We don't love others and obey God to go to heaven. No, we love others and obey the commandments of God because we ARE ALREADY GOING to heaven by God's election before the foundation of the world. Therefore, if we see someone who is exhibiting these evidences of salvation, we don't need to be concerned that maybe God didn't choose them. No, on the contrary, these evidences should give us assurance – just like Paul's assurance of the Thessalonian Christians – that they are already among God's elect.

Conclusion

We have seen from John 3:16, that the "world" in that context is not every person in the world without exception. Instead, Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that there are children of God, there are evidences of the wind of the new birth blowing, in all the world, even among the Gentiles outside the Jewish nation. The scriptures teach that all of mankind is ruined and depraved in sin, and every person in the world without exception is justly worthy of God's eternal wrath. Out of that ruined lot of all the world, God saw fit, according to his own purpose and grace, to choose and elect a group of people to save. Those elect who were chosen were just as unworthy of God's love as those who were passed over. Why did God choose out a people to save? To the praise of the glory of his grace! Therefore, if you love God, believe in Jesus, and have a desire to good works, then let us praise God together for his election of you to salvation before the world began! *"4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."* (Eph. 1:4-6)