

John's Gospel: The TULIP Garden of God

By Ted Sims

"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" (John 3:16). Some teachers would have us believe that this verse means that God loves everyone on the face of the planet and that everyone possesses the ability to go to heaven but that they must exercise their free-will. This is a misinterpretation of Scripture as I will clearly show in the following.

Syllogisms

First, let's look at the first portion of the verse, "For God so loved the world." Does this mean that God loved every single person on the face of the planet, as the Arminians hold, or does it mean that God loves His elect from all peoples and thus "the world" is a term limited in its scope? I propose that it is the latter and to help you see this more clearly I will set up a series of syllogisms which will enable you to see the truth-hood or falsehood of each proposition.

A syllogism is an argument form used in logic which allows one to arrive at truth by a process of deduction. A syllogism consist of: a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. If both premises of the syllogism are true then the conclusion must be true. Let me give an example.

All men are mortal (major premise)

Socrates is a man (minor premise)

Therefore: Socrates is mortal (conclusion)

Now let's take a look at the syllogism. Is the major premise true—are all men mortal? Yes, it is true. All men are mortal. What about the minor premise—is Socrates (or was he) a man? Yes, he

was. The minor premise is true. If it is true that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man then the conclusion that Socrates is mortal must be true also. Now let's apply this to the words of Christ in John 3:16.

Syllogism #1

If God loves everyone then He can't hate anyone.

God hated Esau (Rom. 9:13).

Therefore: God does not love everyone.

There it is. The logic is inescapable. If God hates anyone then He can't love everyone. Romans 9:13 is clear that God loved Jacob but hated Esau. You can't get around this; God is saying that He loves some and hates others. The Scripture is clear. I can, of course, deny that God hates anyone, but I must deny Scripture in order to do so. I may not like this conclusion that God loves some and hates others; I may not understand it. But if I claim Scripture to be true, and if I claim it as the rule by which I must live, then I likewise must conform to it.

For the sake of argument, however, let me set it up another way.

Syllogism #2

God loves everyone.

God sends some people to hell.

Therefore: Some of those whom God loves He sends to hell.

Are you beginning to see just how horrible this proposition is? In saying that some of those who God loves are sent to hell, you deny the very attribute of God that you are trying to defend! Sending someone to hell is not an act of love but of judgment.

Syllogism #3

Either God loves every person on the face of the planet, or He only loves some from all

peoples.

God does not love every person on the face of the planet. (Mal. 1:2,3)

Therefore: God only loves some from all peoples.

One final syllogism I believe will suffice to illustrate that the verse in question does not speak to every individual who ever walked the face of the earth but to those whom God chose to love for reasons too lofty for me to understand. Consider the following.

Syllogism #4

Either God loves everyone or the term world is limited to those God chose to love.

God does not love everyone.

Therefore: The term world is limited to those God chose to love.

Human Inability

Now let's take a look at the rest of the verse. We've already established that God loves only those whom He has chosen to love and that the term "world" is limited to those people.

The next question we need to answer is who are the "whoever believes in Him?" This verse clearly states that anyone that believes in Christ will not perish. However, it does not tell us anything about who these people are, or if everyone, or if anyone possesses this ability. To see this more clearly I must introduce another verse at this point. In John 6:65 Christ states, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." The first thing I want you to notice is that here Christ says "no one can come to me."

The first part of this statement "no one can come to me" is what philosophers call an universal negative. Who can come without the Father enabling him? No one. Let's not miss the little word "unless" however. This little word is what is called a conditional clause, and it indicates, in this instance, an exception to the statement which immediately precedes it, "no one can come to Me

unless it has been granted to him by My Father." What is the condition for my coming to Christ? It must be "granted" by the Father.

Some teach that this simply means that God "draws" or "woos" people to come to Christ but that I must choose of my own free-will to come. The Bible, however, knows nothing of such a teaching. If all it takes is a wooing then why did I choose Christ and the next guy reject Him? Did God woo me a little more than the other guy? Was I more righteous than the other guy? Was I smarter? Did I need Jesus more? What was it that made the difference? I propose that it was because God through an act of regeneration enabled me to come to Christ and the other guy He did not. The book of Ephesians states that God "even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:5). God "made" me alive and that is why I can say with Jonah "salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9).

Someone might say "I thought that God's wooing or His drawing was all people needed." No. This is a mistake for we've seen the problem with this in the previous paragraph. People don't need to be wooed before they comes to Christ—they needs to be "made alive" or regenerated before they can come.

Whenever God regenerates a person He gives him the ability to come. Whenever we talk about humanity's ability or his lack thereof, we are talking about humanity's condition. The teaching on the condition of humanity is called "the doctrine of Original Sin." This does not so much refer to the first sin which Adam committed as it does the consequences of that sin. The Reformed view is that whenever humanity fell, it was a complete fall involving the whole person. That is, the body is fallen, the intellect is fallen, the emotions are fallen, the will is fallen, the soul is fallen. The whole person has fallen. Nothing has escaped the consequences of sin. This is sometimes referred to as total depravity. Not to be confused with utter depravity. Humanity is not as bad as it possibly could be—it are not utterly depraved. However, humanity has fallen completely—it is totally depraved. With this in mind, let's continue. Before the Fall Adam possessed the ability to fellowship with God. He could choose to fellowship with God. When Adam sinned in the Garden

of Eden he experienced spiritual death. As a result of this sin Adam was banished from the garden and thus from fellowship with God. God was the offended party in this whole episode, and thus it would have to be God who reconciled people to Himself once again. He did this through the Cross of Christ. God through the Cross reconciled those whom He had chosen to love and reconcile to Himself. Christ did not merely gain the opportunity for all to be reconciled to God for people do not now possess the ability to fellowship or choose God. Humanity has been banished from fellowship. God must choose to enable people to come to Him for they do not possess this ability. God does this through His sovereign act of regeneration which enables a person to come to Him. It is God alone who makes the heart willing (see Ezekiel 36:26-27). God does not do this for everybody. Why? I don't know—it is His mystery. This is supported in Luke 13:24 that not all who seek will be "able." It doesn't say that they were enabled or wooed and that they chose to reject Christ despite this fact. The text says that they weren't able to come. Some of you will say, "But that's not fair!" Paul discussing this very same issue says: Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" (Rom. 9:18-20).

God does not owe you salvation. He is perfectly just to send everyone to hell for all have sinned, and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). That God has mercy on anyone is a mystery to be sure, but it is God's mystery. For God in His sovereignty retains the right to show mercy to whomever He wants (Rom. 9:18). As before, I say again, "salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2:9). In closing let's look at the last half of John 3:16 "should not perish but have everlasting life."

Those whom God chooses, loves, and dies for, He loves with an everlasting love and they shall never perish for nothing can "separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (see Rom. 8:28-39).

Summary

Now let's sum up what we've learned from this passage.

First, God doesn't love everyone but chose to love some before we were ever born (Rom. 9:11). This is sometimes referred to as Unconditional Election—TULIP.

Second, that Christ died not for the "everyone in the world" but for the "world" in the sense of some from all peoples (John 10:11; 17:2,6,9). This is what Calvinist call Limited Atonement—TULIP.

Third, we learned that Christ died for a people who were fallen totally (Isa. 64:6). They were in a state of Total Depravity—TULIP.

Fourth, we learned that God through a sovereign act of regeneration "drew" His chosen to Himself (Phil. 2:13; Acts 13:48). This is what Calvinist mean by Irresistible Grace—TULIP.

Finally, we learned that those whom God chooses, dies for, and effectually calls by a regenerating act, He also preserves to the end (1 Cor. 1:4-9; 2 Cor. 1:22). This is what is meant by the Perseverance of the Saints—TULIP. I have nothing left to boast. Soli Deo Gloria!

We've covered some pretty hard sayings today and many of you have never heard John 3:16 expounded in this way. But that's okay--none of those of Jesus' day had ever heard anyone speak in the way Jesus spoke either. He was just as offensive to those of His day as He is now.

Consider the following passage from John: And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:65-67).

What will you do reader? Will you turn back also or will you answer with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Note: All Scripture references from: The New King James Version. Nashville, TN:
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