

Chris Whisonant 16-04-2014, 16:53

Dr. Harwood, I listened to your message on YouTube yesterday and was pointed to this transcript today. I do have some points of disagreement with you in several areas. But without digressing, I would like to point out that you have grossly taken D.A. Carson out of context. You stated the following:

“D. A. Carson, like them, is a Calvinist. But Carson disagrees with their interpretation of John 3:16. Carson writes: ‘I know that some try to take kosmos (world) here to refer to the elect. But that really will not do. All the evidence of the usage of the word in John’s gospel is against the suggestion. ... God’s love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect.[3]’”

This quote comes from the following document. This one section really speaks for itself (I will quote Carson’s entire paragraph below) but you have failed to acknowledge (and intentionally removed the relevant context) that Carson was not talking about “world” in the same way that you were. Your primary point, and it’s the point of the section where you quoted Carson, was that God loves “every person” in the “world”. Your point here is to quote Carson to prove that he disagrees with Owen and Turretin on their interpretation of the extent of “world” in John 3:16 to show that Carson’s thoughts are not in line with other Calvinists who are referring to “world” here in the sense of its scope of size (i.e. the number of individual people).

Here is the relevant section from Carson (which can be found here: http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/2000_difficult_doctrine_of_the_love_of_God.pdf) on page 17.

“God’s salvific stance toward his fallen world. God so loved the world that he gave his Son (John 3:16). I know that some try to take ko ? smoy (“world”) here to refer to the elect. But that really will not do. All the evidence of the usage of the word in John’s Gospel is against the suggestion. True, world in John does not so much refer to bigness as to badness. In John’s vocabulary, world is primarily the moral order in willful and culpable rebellion against God. In John 3:16 God’s love in sending the Lord Jesus is to be admired not because it is extended to so big a thing as the world, but to so bad a thing; not to so many people, as to such wicked people. Nevertheless elsewhere John can speak of “the whole world” (1 John 2:2), thus bringing bigness and badness together. More importantly, in Johannine theology the disciples themselves once belonged to the world but were drawn out of it (e.g., John 15:19). On this axis, God’s love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect.”

Carson is being very careful and clear on his point. One can argue with whether his interpretation of John’s use of “world” is right. But the point is that you completely mishandled his quote in order to prove your own point. Carson was in no way stating that John is referring to a smaller subset of individuals in the world (the elect), but that we are missing the point that John’s truly making – that being that “world” “does not so much refer to bigness as to badness”. And if you continue reading onto page 18 of Carson, you’ll find the following: “God sets his affection on his chosen ones in a way in which he does not set his affection on others.”

If you read pages 73 and following, you’ll find Carson’s discussion about “The Intent of the Atonement” where he definitely does not track with your point and where he states the following on page 77:

“I argue, then, that both Arminians and Calvinists should rightly affirm that Christ died for all, in the sense that Christ’s death was sufficient for all and that Scripture portrays God as inviting, commanding, and desiring the salvation of all, out of love (in the third sense developed in the first chapter). Further, all Christians ought also to confess that, in a slightly different sense, Christ Jesus, in the intent of God, died effectively for the elect alone, in line with the way the Bible speaks of God’s special selecting love for the elect (in the fourth sense developed in

the first chapter).”

Hopefully this will at least clear it up for those reading the comments that Carson doesn't see John 3:16 in the same way that you do.

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