

September 2016

## The Extent of God's Love as Based on the Greek Word Kosmos in the Johannine Corpus

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### Recommended Citation

Crammer, Kevin D. (2016) "The Extent of God's Love as Based on the Greek Word Kosmos in the Johannine Corpus," *Diligence: Journal of the Liberty University Online Religion Capstone in Research and Scholarship*: Vol. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc/vol1/iss1/14>

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### Introduction

The extent of God's love is a concept that suffers from distortion. At one end of the spectrum, it can be distorted through sentimentality, effectively broadening the scope. Lewis addresses this issue, saying, "To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God."<sup>1</sup> At the other end is distortion through restriction, thereby significantly reducing the scope. In some theological circles, God's love is limited to the elect. This view can lead to evangelical apathy or at the very least, create a hesitancy to proclaim, "God loves you." Carson identifies this issue among "young Reformed ministers who know it is right to offer the Gospel freely, but who have no idea how to do it without contravening some element in their conception of Reformed theology."<sup>2</sup> From a biblical perspective, one's view of God's work in election, whether individual or corporate, should not diminish the universal aspects of his call to humanity or love for the same. The question then becomes, "What is the extent of God's love?" Regardless of theological leanings, biblical scholars are forced to confront the writings of the apostle John. It is the aim of this paper to examine the Johannine corpus and determine the extent of God's love, based upon John's use of the Greek word *kosmos* (world). John employs the word *kosmos* ubiquitously, displaying a semantic range that includes universe, earth and humanity with nuanced variation and places the concept of world at the center of theological thinking, which includes all of unredeemed humanity as an object of God's love. It will be assumed that the apostle John and the "disciple whom Jesus loved" are one and the same, also known as John the brother of James, sons of Zebedee (John 13:23; Matt 10:2). This John is assumed to be the inspired author of the canonical books associated with his name. Finally, it is assumed that Jesus and the Father are one and that their love is in concert (John 10:30, 5:19). Attention will focus on John's gospel account and first epistle. The remaining two epistles are brief letters that add little to the evaluation. While Revelation speaks thematically to the consummation of God's love, the apocalyptic nature of the text will, in large part, place it outside of the context of this paper.

### John, the Author

The Johannine corpus traditionally includes John's gospel, three epistles (1-3 John) and the Revelation. Many agree that John wrote from a center within the Johannine community, where the apostle was held in high regard. Keener settles on either Ephesus or Smyrna and finds that the audience of the Fourth Gospel was most likely "Jewish-Christian communities in Smyrna and Philadelphia, during his

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 43.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 23.

tenure of ministry in Roman Asia.”<sup>3</sup> Kruse identifies the addressees of John’s first epistle as those who “appear to have been members of a number of churches in fellowship with the church of which the author was a member.”<sup>4</sup> While it can be difficult to pin down provenance and audience, all agree on the distinct nature of the Johannine corpus.

Keener finds the greatest distinction in John’s writing at the theological level. He states, “Commentators regularly cite the verdict of Clement of Alexandria, preserved in Eusebius, that John differs from the Synoptics as a more ‘spiritual’ gospel, that is, a more theologically interpretive one.”<sup>5</sup> Others see distinction in John’s Christology or portrayal of Jesus. Carson says, “John’s presentation of *who Jesus is* lies at the heart of all that is distinctive in this Gospel.”<sup>6</sup> Another aspect that should not escape the conscientious reader is the emphasis of Jesus in relation to the Father. Michaels adds, “The Gospel of John, then, is not just about Jesus but about God, as is evident not only in its Christology but in its message of salvation.”<sup>7</sup> The message of salvation presupposes motivation, a motivation John firmly grounds in love. Brown concludes, “The love of the Johannine believer is to make known the God and Father of Jesus, that others may recognize Jesus as the sent one of the Father. In his departure through death, Jesus reveals the love of God, glorifies God, and is himself glorified. The disciples are exhorted to the glory of loving.”<sup>8</sup>

It could be argued that to place John’s writing within a single motif, it must be that of love. In his article on a linguistic overview of 1 John, Tan says, “Love dominates the landscape.”<sup>9</sup> It is a theme that permeates the Johannine corpus. It was John who wrote, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8, ESV). Kreeft goes a step further, saying, “He spoke always and only of one thing: the love of God.”<sup>10</sup> If this is the case, then in seeking to determine the extent of God’s love through biblical analysis, it would appear that all roads lead to John. Köstenberger identifies John’s use of the Greek words *phileō* and

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<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1:149.

<sup>4</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:149.

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 95.

<sup>7</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 41.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 313.

<sup>9</sup> Randall K. J. Tan, “A Linguistic Overview of 1 John,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 71, <http://equip.sbts.edu/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/sbjt-103-fall-2006/a-linguistic-overview-of-1-john>, accessed April 10, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Kreeft, *The God Who Loves You* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 35.

*agapaō* (both translated love) as comprising 52% and 25% of the New Testament occurrences, respectively.<sup>11</sup> But to show extent, it becomes necessary to show a connection to “God’s love” of which John is fond of writing. Therefore, the gap is bridged through his use of the Greek word *kosmos* (translated world) as an object of affection. It is through this connection that John could confidently write, “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16).

### **New Testament Use of the Greek Word *Kosmos***

Where the interpretation of Scripture is concerned, the range of semantic fields in the original Greek language can be a contributing factor to the aforementioned distortion. Based on his survey of Johannine vocabulary, Köstenberger identifies *kosmos* as one of the major semantic domains present in John’s gospel and letters.<sup>12</sup> Since the word “world” is ubiquitous in John’s writings, it is necessary to determine the range of possible meanings at the time it was used. Over time, words that survive in a language can take on various meanings. Determining original word meanings is a step in the process of hermeneutics or the science and art of biblical interpretation. Virkler says, “It is necessary to identify the various possible meanings of ancient words at the time the biblical author used them and then to determine which of the several possible meanings is the one the author intended to convey in a specific context.”<sup>13</sup> First-century meanings of the word *kosmos* help determine, to a limited extent, John’s intent. The data in Table 1 is taken from *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), third edition.<sup>14</sup> It provides eight possible meanings, contemporary with John.

**Table 1. First-century semantic range of the Greek word κόσμος**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | that which serves to beautify through decoration, <i>adornment</i>           |
| 2 | condition for orderliness, <i>orderly arrangement, order</i>                 |
| 3 | the sum total of everything here and now, <i>the (orderly) universe</i>      |
| 4 | the sum total of all beings above the level of the animals, <i>the world</i> |
| 5 | planet earth as a place of inhabitation, <i>the world</i>                    |

<sup>11</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 129.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Henry A. Virkler and Karelynne Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 100.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 561-563.

- 6      humanity in general, *the world*
- 7      the system of human existence in its many aspects, *the world*
- 8      collective aspect of an entity, *totality, sum total*

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When John writes, “He was in the *world*, and though the *world* was made through him, the *world* did not recognize him,” the table serves as a starting point for determining his original intent (John 1:10; emphasis mine). Interpreters might initially designate John’s usage as follows: He was in the world (5 - as a place of habitation), the world (3 - the orderly universe) was made through him and the world (1 - humanity in general), did not recognize him. This verse displays the varied nuance John employs throughout his body of work. Kittel says, “All meanings of κόσμος come together in the usage of the Fourth Gospel.”<sup>15</sup>

#### **John’s Use of Κόσμος**

It is through his wide-ranging use that John creates a noticeable tension and measure of ambiguity. Clark says, “John is exploiting the multiple meanings of *kosmos* in order to create an effect that is probably designed to make the reader think carefully about what he intended.”<sup>16</sup> He presents the world as something that Jesus comes into and a world to which he does not belong (John 1:10, 8:23). It is the world that goes after Jesus and yet the world that hates him (John 12:19, 15:18). Renz states, “The reason for these ambiguities lies in the fact that human beings are charged with taking care of the world as God’s representatives, but have failed to represent God faithfully. In consequence the world is shaped not only by God’s design in creation, but also by human rebellion against God.”<sup>17</sup> It is from this partial shaping that the word “world” assumes a negative connotation and in its hostility embodies a system under “the ruler of this world” (John 12:32). In this sense, neither Jesus nor his disciples are part of the world (John 17:16). Clark asserts, “The meaning is clearly *kosmos* as a system hostile to God.”<sup>18</sup>

If the world as a hostile system opposed to God is shaped by man’s rebellion, then in keeping with that theme, Christ came to reshape it. Marshall points out, “‘*This world*’ is pervaded by a spirit of its own, which has to be exorcized by the Spirit of God, if it is not to remain in control over human reason

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<sup>15</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966), 894.

<sup>16</sup> David J. Clark, “The Word *Kosmos* ‘World’ in John 17,” *United Bible Society* 50, no. 4 (1999): 404, ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, EBSCO host, accessed April 6, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> T. Renz, “World” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, et. al. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 854.

<sup>18</sup> Clark, “The Word *Kosmos* ‘World’ in John 17,” 404.

and understanding.”<sup>19</sup> John places Jesus within this adverse environment, inhabited by humanity and identifies it as something that he came to save (John 1:14, 12:47). This is seen in John 17, where Jesus not only prayed for his disciples, but for those who would believe through them. Morris speaks against those who would cite John 17:9 as evidence that Jesus refused to pray for the world. He states, “Both times [17:21, 23] he is praying that the world may come to recognize the Father’s hand in what he was doing, and that, of course, means that it ceases to be the world and comes to be numbered among the followers of him whom God sent.”<sup>20</sup> His prayer is not that the world should remain in its current state, but rather as Kittel points out, “When the κόσμος is redeemed, it ceases to be κόσμος.”<sup>21</sup> It is at this intersection where the One who made the world enters it, finding it diametrically opposed to his person and purpose, that John associates God’s love with that same world. In light of this estrangement, Marrow states, “There can be, of course, no doubt that the κόσμος in the Gospel of John is, in its positive sense, the object of God’s love and redemption.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Κόσμος in the First Letter of John**

When speaking of the world as an object of God’s love, John is not showering his readers with mere words; he is pointing them to a divine act of love. John’s definition of love, found in his first epistle, is grounded in a divine love and expressed through the act of sending. He writes, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God *sent* his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and *sent* his Son to be the propitiation for our sin” (1 John 4:9-10; emphasis mine). Joslin states, “Love is rooted in action and this is seen in God’s sending of his Son to give life to those who believe. His love is made evident in his concrete action of sending Christ to bear the wrath of God and to cleanse believers from guilt and sin.”<sup>23</sup> Still, the sending is tied to propitiation.

The word propitiation is translated from the Greek noun *hilasmos*, found six times in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament and only twice in the New Testament, both occurring in 1 John (2:2, 4:10). Here, it almost always refers to atonement or forgiveness. According to Kruse, “The cognate verb

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<sup>19</sup> I. Howard Marshall, et al., eds., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 1092.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 142.

<sup>21</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 893.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley B. Marrow, “Κόσμος in John,” *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (01, 2002): 97, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>, accessed April 6, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Barry Clyde Joslin, “Getting Up to Speed: An Essential Introduction to 1 John,” *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 12, <http://equip.sbts.edu/category/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/sbjt-103-fall-2006>, accessed April 10, 2018.

*hilastērion* is found 28 times in the LXX, all of which refer to the mercy seat in the tabernacle” and “in Rom 3:25 to denote Christ as the atoning sacrifice set forth by God.”<sup>24</sup> When John uses *hilasmos*, he is evoking imagery of the mercy seat and pointing back to the cross as the place of atonement. Yarbrough says, “In NT parlance ‘atonement’ and ‘cross’ are very nearly synonymous,” and “may be defined as God’s work on sinners’ behalf to reconcile them to himself. It is the divine activity that confronts and resolves the problem of human sin.”<sup>25</sup> To effect reconciliation, the love of God, demonstrated by sending the Son, was tied to the purpose of propitiation. Therefore, propitiation can be viewed as an act of God’s love, an act John extends to the whole world.

In 1 John 2:1-2, he writes, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those* of the whole world.” John identifies Jesus as the propitiation for the sins of those to whom he is writing (i.e. believers), but goes on to include ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, translated “the whole world.” MacArthur says, “To be faithful to the truth revealed in Scripture, the whole world must be comprehended as a generic expression that refers to humanity throughout the earth, but not necessarily to every individual.”<sup>26</sup> MacArthur’s caution is against universalism, the belief that all will be saved. The purpose here is to determine whether or not the entire world is in view, a conclusion he supports with caveat. As Little says, “Christ died for the sins of the world (1 John 2:1-2), and only those in Christ are delivered from the second death.” Akin adds, “It is important to note that there is a universal component to this atoning work: it is ‘for [the sins] of the whole world.’”<sup>27</sup> For John, God’s love is manifested by the sending of his Son and his propitiatory act, an act that he clearly extends to the whole world. Kruse agrees, stating, “When the author says that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for ‘the sins of the whole world’, that includes not only our sins (i.e., the sins of believers) but the sins of the unbelieving world as well.”<sup>28</sup> In John’s letter, God is the initiator (1 John 4:10, 19). Stott makes an astute point, saying, “God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 76.

<sup>25</sup> R. W. Yarbrough, “Atonement,” in in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, et. al. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 393.

<sup>26</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1-3 John* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 49.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 74.

<sup>29</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th Anniv. ed. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 172.

In 1 John 4:14, John gives eyewitness testimony. He says, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” It would seem prudent here, not to overextend or misrepresent the words of John. The word *kosmos* is often used in a restricted sense. While the declarative statement includes the world, it is not all inclusive. If the Son is the only way in which someone in the world may be saved (cf. John 14:16), then it is proper to identify him as the “Savior of the world,” speaking to potentiality versus actuality. In this case, for all those who are saved or will be saved, *kosmos* functions as the collective aspect of that entity or sum total per BDAG.<sup>30</sup> However, it is not in opposition to the discussion at hand, but more fully understood in light of definitive portions of the text. A similar verse is found in John’s Gospel.

### **Κόσμος in John’s Gospel**

Following his prologue, John provides an overview of John the Baptist through dialogue with a group of priests and Levites. After making clear who the Baptist was not, John has Jesus entering the picture and records the response of the Baptist. He writes, “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’” (John 1:29)! At this early stage of the Fourth Gospel, there is considerable debate as to whether these words can be attributed to the Baptist or the author himself. To that point, the words ultimately belong to the inspired writer and have no bearing on the subject of extent. Further disagreement ensues as to what type of “lamb” he may be referring.<sup>31</sup> But Carson says, “Just as John insists that Caiaphas the high priest spoke better than he knew (11:49-52), so it is easy to suppose the Evangelist understood the Baptist to be doing the same thing.”<sup>32</sup> John is writing from a post-resurrection perspective, which sheds considerable light on the issue. Carson states, “It is hard to imagine that he could use an expression such as ‘Lamb of God’ without thinking of the atoning sacrifice of his resurrected and ascended Saviour.”<sup>33</sup> Michaels suggests that the phrase “the Son of God” could have been used and ties the purpose of word choice to purity. He says, “When we are told in 1 John 3:5 that Jesus ‘was revealed so that he might take away the sins,’ the author adds, ‘in him there is no sin.’ Without using the term ‘Lamb,’ the passage in 1 John makes the point that Jesus is a Messiah ‘without defect’ (like the Passover lamb of Exod 12:5).”<sup>34</sup> The atoning sacrifice of the Lamb without defect is the One (ὁ ἄρων) who takes away or will take away the sins of the world (τοῦ

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 563.

<sup>31</sup> For a full discussion, see Köstenberger’s “Jesus the ‘Lamb of God’” in *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 150.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 110.



κόσμου), which according to Harris, implies “the whole human race, not simply Jews (cf. Isa 53:8).”<sup>35</sup> Köstenberger describes this concept as foreign to “Jewish first-century ears,” but states, “John makes clear that Jesus came to save the entire world (3:17; 1 John 2:2) and that he is Savior of the world, not merely Israel (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).”<sup>36</sup> This inclusion in association with the title are also found in John’s account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well.

In John 4, he tells of Jesus’ interaction with a Samaritan woman. Here, Jesus reveals the nature of true worship and the woman’s past. As a result of her subsequent testimony, the Samaritans encouraged Jesus to stay and many came to believe. John writes, “They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world’ (4:42). While *kosmos* includes the Samaritans, the title here is viewed by many as a statement against imperial rule. Keener states, “The title would perhaps most easily evoke the emperor, who ruled the Samaritans but now found competition in Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Koester adds, “The Samaritans recognized that it truly belonged to Jesus, who they received in a manner appropriate for a king.”<sup>38</sup> The use of *kosmos* in this context does little to advance the argument for extent. However, Savior of the world “seems to have become a recognized title for Jesus in Johannine circles,”<sup>39</sup> one that undoubtedly was informed by more than his supremacy to Caesar. It is not surprising that the definitive passages pointing to the extent of God’s love reach their apex in Jesus, the Savior of the world.

In John 3, he recounts a conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus on the subject of being born again or born of the Spirit. Afterwards, Jesus makes an Old Testament allusion, saying, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (vv. 14-15), an obvious reference to the cross. Carson comments, “As the new birth, the acquisition of eternal life, has been grounded in the ‘lifting up’ of the Son, so also that ‘lifting up’, the climax of the Son’s mission, is itself grounded in the love of God.”<sup>40</sup>

John writes, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Michaels addresses the import, saying, “This is the first mention of love in the

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<sup>35</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: John* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 45.

<sup>36</sup> Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 415.

<sup>37</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:628.

<sup>38</sup> Craig R. Koester, “The Savior of the World (John 4:42),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 680, ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, EBSCOhost, accessed April 6, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:628.

<sup>40</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 204.

Gospel of John, and it is rather untypical in that the object of God's love is 'the world' (*ton kosmon*). Nowhere else in John's Gospel (or anywhere else in the New Testament!) is God explicitly said to 'love' the world."<sup>41</sup> The original text could be rendered, "This is how God loved the world."<sup>42</sup> Pointing out John's qualitative language, Keener agrees, stating, "Οὕτως means, 'This is *how* God loved the world'; the cross is the ultimate expression of his love."<sup>43</sup> In the context, τὸν κόσμον is inclusive, with every single person in view. Vines addresses the use of *kosmos* and says, "It refers to the sum total of all people. The verse provides no hint there that 'world' refers only to the world of the elect."<sup>44</sup> For John, God's love is demonstrable. In his first epistle, it was manifested by sending. In his Gospel, it is manifested by giving.

Both are motivated by love and inextricably woven together as the sending was for the redemptive purpose found in the giving. Michaels says, "The 'giving' includes all that the 'sending' does and more, for in sending his 'One and Only' into the world, God gave him up to death on a cross."<sup>45</sup> Harris adds, "The Father's giving was his sending his Son into the world but also his giving him over to death: both the incarnation and the crucifixion are in John's mind."<sup>46</sup> Returning to the tension John introduces through his use of *kosmos*, Carson says, "God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big and includes so many people, but because the world is so bad: that is the customary connotation of *kosmos*."<sup>47</sup> Harris views this verse as the summation of John's gospel message and offers the following paraphrase of the Greek text:

God the Father loved all human beings to such an extent that he actually sent his one and only Son into the world and then gave him over to death, so that everyone without distinction or exception who places trust in Jesus may now and in the hereafter experience eternal life and so not suffer God's wrath and thus be lost.<sup>48</sup>

It should be clear that while John's use of *kosmos* presents ambiguity and tension, it also serves to present all of unredeemed humanity, every soul, as an object of

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<sup>41</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 201.

<sup>42</sup> William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 355.

<sup>43</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:566.

<sup>44</sup> Jerry Vines, "Sermon on John 3:16," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, *John*, 78.

<sup>47</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 205.

<sup>48</sup> Harris, *John*, 78.

God's love. Keener states it succinctly, "In Johannine theology God's love for the 'world' represents his love for all humanity."<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper has been narrowly focused for the purpose of demonstrating the extent of God's love as based on the Greek word *kosmos* in the Johannine corpus. In following that course, much has been left unsaid. God's love is unconditional, but it is not without condition. John himself wrote, "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:17). However, it is the boundless nature of that love, extended to undeserving sinners, that has sought expression here. Chrysostom eloquently says, "For by the express, 'so loved,' and that other, 'God the world,' He shows the great strength of His love. Large and infinite was the interval between the two. He, the immortal, who is without beginning, the Infinite Majesty, they but dust and ashes, full of ten thousand sins, who, ungrateful, have at all times offended Him; and these He 'loved.'"<sup>50</sup>

Carson addresses the original problem, "God's love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect."<sup>51</sup> Wrestling with God's Word can leave one both blessed and walking away with theological limp; for one cannot faithfully examine Scripture without being examined. Vanhoozer speaks to what has been an overarching purpose here. He says, "Instead of trying to situate the love of God under one doctrinal locus, the theologian's task is rather to witness to its inexhaustibility. To write on the love of God is the Christian theologian's supreme privilege and supreme responsibility."<sup>52</sup> God is glorified through his works on display. And if as John says, "God is love," then he is glorified in displaying his love, which is why the Holy Spirit inspired love-language, not only John's body of work, but throughout Scripture.

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<sup>49</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:569.

<sup>50</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homilies on St. John: XXVII" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 95.

<sup>51</sup> Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 29.

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