

Biblical Notes – John 1:29

29 – The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
(29. Τῇ ἐπαύριον βλέπει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ λέγει· ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἀμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου)

"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29). Again we ask the reader to note carefully the exact wording of this sentence: it is not (as so often misquoted) "The Lamb of God which taketh the sins of the world," but "the sin of the world." The word sin is used in the New Testament in several ways. Sometimes the reference is to the sinful nature, as in Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 1:8, etc. Sometimes it is the sinful act which is in view, as in James 1:15, etc. At other times "sin" refers to the guilt or penalty of sin, as in Romans 3:9, 6:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21. It is in this last sense "sin" is used in John 1:29. The definite article (in the Greek and in the English) makes this clear. The Lamb of God which beareth away the guilt and consequent penalty, is the thought.

But now, what is meant by "taketh away the sin of the world"? Does it mean that the Lamb of God took away the guilt of the whole human race? If it does, then the whole human race will most certainly be saved—unpunished sin (and its defilement) is the only thing which would keep any man out of heaven. But if "the world" does not mean the whole human race, what does it refer to? We answer: It is a general, an indefinite expression, used, first, in contrast with Israel. "It is not 'the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of Israel,' but the sin of 'the world'—of any kind of men" (Mr. F.W. Grant). The "world" here takes in believing sinners of the Gentiles, as well as believing Jews.

That "the world" is a general and indefinite expression, rather than a synonym for the whole human race, is clear from its meaning in other passages in John's Gospel. For example, in John 7:4, "Show thyself to the world." Did they mean, "Show thyself to the whole human race"? Surely not. Again, "Behold the world is gone after him" (Joh 12:19). Did they mean the whole human race had gone after Him? Of course not. "I come not to judge the world but to save the world" (Joh 12:47). Did Christ mean that He had come to save the whole human race? How could He, when multitudes were even then in hell!

The Greek word for "world" in John 1:29 is "kosmos," and in its application to humankind in the New Testament, we find there are two "worlds"—a world of believers and a world of unbelievers. In 2 Peter 2:5 this expression is used, "bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." Contrariwise, there is a world of the godly. This is the meaning of John 1:29, it was the sin (penalty) of the world of believers—Jewish believers and Gentile believers—that the Lamb of God took away. This is no novel interpretation of ours, but one so given by the Reformers and Puritans.

— A.W. Pink, The Atoning Sacrifice of Christ.