

“THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD”

John 3:17-21

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INTRODUCTION

Last week we heard the “Greatest Story Ever Told”; John 3:16. John told us that God gave Jesus to the world in order to save the world from perishing, and in order to give people eternal life—people that believe in Him as the “Only Begotten Son of God.”

However, it is very obvious that most of the world has not received such life; most people are still lost in their sins and are doomed to perish. How can we account for this?

Is it possible after all that God really sent Jesus in order to judge the world?

When men are judged, what is the basis of their judgment?

What method will God use to determine the judgment of men?

The fact of the matter is that the Lord has made it difficult for men to perish, and simple for men to have eternal life! If people perish, it is because they refuse to accept God’s amazing provision in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

The saying when someone wishes to prohibit someone from doing something—“Over my dead body.”

IF YOU GO TO HELL, YOU WILL DO SO OVER THE DEAD BODY OF JESUS CHRIST.

When you reject Jesus Christ, you regard His death as worthless or at least unimportant to you—you reject His death for you. The very means of your salvation becomes the means for your condemnation.

I. THE PERSON OF JUDGMENT—THE SON (17)

A. The Son [“Sent” by His Father **not to Judge** the World (cf. 12:47)]

1. The Divine commission of Jesus—sent
2. The Dignity of Jesus—the Son
3. The Destination of Jesus—the world
4. The Duty of Jesus—not to condemn
His first coming stressed redemption

Compare 9:39—“For judgment I came into this world.”

Is this a contradiction? (Not at all; note that John stresses judgment.)

Does not Scripture put all judgment under Jesus’ authority? (5:22, 27)

Christ judges (8:16, 26; 5:30); His word judges (12:48)

His judgment is just (5:30) and true (8:16).

The outcome of His judgment depends upon the relationship of men to Him (5:24)

The world and Satan are judged in His cross (12:31).

The whole doctrine of judgment is modified in light of Jesus' incarnation—Jesus' life and death have effects on the judgment.

But, Jesus' purpose for coming the first time was not to judge.

B. The Son Sent by His Father **to Save** the World

1. The Object of His Saving intent—the World
2. The agent of His Saving intent—the Son in His death
3. The Power of His saving intent—*God's* (Note "be saved")
4. The Result of His saving intent—"eternal life" (v. 16)

But note, that those not saved by Him, are by a necessary result later judged by Him! What is the basis of such a judgment?

II. THE BASIS OF JUDGMENT (18)—FAITH or Unbelief (**3 times mentioned here**)

A. Faith in Him Averts Judgment (Believer is **Justified and not condemned**)

1. The act of believing—continuously
2. The act of not being judged—presently

B. Unbelief in Him Confirms Judgment.

1. The act of unbelieving—continuously
2. The state of being judged—**He stands under the sentence!**
He has been judged already—in his human depravity, and in his horrid rejection of the Son. He doesn't have to wait until judgment day!
3. The state of continuing unbelief—not having entered into a continuing state of belief. **This rejection and unbelief makes the guilt and resulting judgment even worse for the unsaved person.**
 - a. Unbelief in His Name
 - b. Unbelief in His Divine Dignity—*Only Begotten, Son of God*
Not to believe in such a person is to condemn oneself.

NOTE THE ENORMITY OF THIS REFUSAL.

Note that Christ's Death does not automatically save men—Faith is Necessary. Jesus divides men into *the saved and the unsaved—justified and condemned. He did not come to judge, and yet He did come to judge. HE CHALLENGES MEN TO A DECISION. His saving act has become the means of judgment.*

III. THE METHOD OF JUDGMENT (19-21)—RESPONSE TO THE LIGHT

These verses show the way the Lord separates and distinguishes—His process.

He separates the "children of light" from "the children of darkness."

Note the emphasis upon light here—5 times in vv. 19-21.

Light has the idea of both *truth* and *good*. Darkness connotes *error* and *evil*.

In John, Christ is the Light! (See 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; here, etc.)

Christ, the Light of the world, *has come* into the world (abiding results of His coming.)

He received a twofold response.

A. Those Who Love the Darkness but Hate the Light (19-20)

1. Men—the majority of those in the world—Loved Darkness rather than Light (19). *Here it is **the** darkness rather than **the** light—a stark contrast.*

a. Note the *tragic tone* here again in John—How is it possible for people to love that which is inferior, hurtful, and evil over that which is superior, helpful, and good?

Men preferred darkness to light! Thus their condemnation is certain and deserving. Note the past tenses here, showing John's retrospect upon the actual responses that had been taking place since Jesus' coming. At the time that the offer was made to people, they chose to remain in their spiritual darkness and sin rather than to accept Christ's forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Illus: People who prefer garbage to nutritious food.

People who prefer sickness to health.

Those who prefer pain & torture to ease and comfort.

Those who prefer losing to winning.

Those who prefer physical and sexual abuse to loving nurture.

Those who prefer war to peace.

Those who prefer depression to economic prosperity.

**NOW WHO IN THEIR RIGHT MINDS WOULD PREFER SUCH THINGS?
THEN HOW CAN MEN PREFER DARKNESS TO LIGHT?**

b. The reason is that “their deeds were evil.”

Satan is “the evil one” (17:15; I Jn. 2:13), this age is “the evil age” (Mt. 7:22), this generation is an “evil generation” (Mt. 12:39),

There is likely no allusion here to Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night; he was not coming for a bad thing but for a good thing—to learn from Jesus.

2. Men Hated the Light (20). [Note the individualizing of the response here.]

How can people HATE something so **good and wonderful**?

John uses this word **12 times**—about 1/3 of all NT usages. The apostle of “love” also clearly understands the “hate” of those who have not the love of God. ***“This fight is no tepid affair.” Bitter hatred comes out from those who refuse the truth and prefer the darkness.***

***THIS ATTITUDE HELPS TO EXPLAIN ALL OF THE REJECTION,
MOCKERY, PERSECUTION, AND KILLING OF CHRISTIANS
THROUGH THE YEARS AND AROUND THE WORLD.***

a. They are *practicing* evil—bad, foul, and worthless behavior. (5:29)

Evil deeds demonstrate their rejection of Christ—the Light of God.

b. They have **aversion** to the Light.

They “do not come to the light” They AVOID the Light—even Christ. **Why else do so many avoid the Bible, church, Christians, etc.?**

Hendrickson compares this rejection of light to LOATHSOME INSECTS hiding beneath logs and stones—preferring darkness and frightened when exposed to light; in fact, they go scurrying in every direction looking for cover!

c. They have fear of exposure—“Lest his deeds should be exposed.”

That is, brought to the light! To show the darkness for what it really is—to have it rebuked.

The verb refers to something being sifted, tested, tried, then if found wanting, convicted, reproved, shown to be faulty.

No one likes this, especially those who are persistent in wrongdoing! They have a fear of a correcting reproof. This keeps people from the light. THERE IS A MORAL BASIS BEHIND MUCH UNBELIEF.

B. Those Who Move toward the Light (21)

Contrast those who scurry away from the light with these who “come to the light.” These may be likened to “beautiful house plants” which turn their leaves toward the light! (Hendrickson) These “walk in the light” (I Jn. 1:7), not in the darkness (I Jn. 1:6). If they walk in darkness, they lie and do not “do the truth” (I Jn. 1:6).

1. They are practicing the truth.

We speak of “telling the truth”; but John shows us that we must also “do the truth.” Our actions must conform to the standards of God’s word—which are truth. Contrast those in darkness who practice evil (v. 20). Right action is true thought realized.” Paul also contrasts truth with unrighteousness (e.g. II Thess. 2:12; I Cor. 13:6; Rom. 1:18; 2:8). True actions are **unafraid of light—in fact, they welcome the light**. Compare the one who “does or makes a lie” (Rev. 21:27).

2. They allow their deeds to become manifested—exposing them to the light.

There is nothing to hide, nothing evil that the light can uncover in their deeds, nothing to be ashamed of, nothing of which to become convicted (contrast v. 20). Light simply clarifies this to all.

3. Their deeds are “worked by God.”

The emphasis is on **by God**. The reason the deeds stand the test of the light is that **God is the author of them!** These deeds have a *permanence*. They are of an enduring quality [perfect tense]. The believer seeks to have his deeds manifested, not so that he may be glorified, but so that God may be. Only in fellowship with God can he do these deeds.

Does this passage teach that some men are by nature good with good deeds? **NO! God forbid!** John is not teaching salvation by works or by nature. This entire passage teaches the new birth—God changes our nature to make it possible for us to practice righteousness. This is the portrait of the man who responds to the Gospel and finds new life in Christ. His **first practice of the truth is found in verse 18—He believes on Him. Even that act is “wrought in God.”**

Morris states that it is only the man “on whom God has laid His hand who can truly say that his works are ‘wrought in God.’” This man will not avoid the light.

Who are some examples of this in John’s Gospel? Andrew, Simon, Nathaniel, and John himself (though unmentioned).

CONCLUSION

Yes, the Lord came not to condemn the world, but to save the world. He invites all to believe in Him in order to avoid judgment; many refuse to believe and stand condemned. Many refuse the light and love the darkness—preferring their evil deeds. Christ-rejecters hate the light and refuse to come to it, lest their wicked ways become exposed. But the born again person who practices the truth enjoys the light and loves to show that his deeds are worked by God.

The important question is: ARE YOU ONE OF THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT, OR ARE YOU A CHILD OF DARKNESS? Are you a believer in the Son, or one who stands condemned by the Son?