

Light in Place of Deadly Darkness

John 3:16–21

Jesus has dispensed with pleasantries in his meeting with the respected religious leader Nicodemus. He has abruptly told him what is necessary to see and enter the kingdom of God: he must be born again. This baffles Nicodemus. He tries to understand it with his flesh and intellect. How can this be? Must a man crawl back into his mother's womb? Jesus's response shows that Nicodemus's problem is not intellectual, but moral. He is in rebellion against God—he will not receive Jesus. And he is hardened in unbelief—he will not believe Jesus. It's a hard, awkward conversation, but essential if Nicodemus is to be delivered from the condemnation he is already under.

Nicodemus stands in for every man. Though gifted, brilliant, respected, and upright in the eyes of the world, to the Son of God he is a condemned man lost in rebellion. It is in this context of condemnation and defiance that Jesus reveals the Father's love and His saving mission. Nicodemus needed to know the Savior came, not because of any merit in him, but out of God's unmerited love. And we need to know the same. It is not because of some island of attractiveness in the dark sea of our sin that God comes; it is in spite of the comprehensive sinful darkness that consumes us that he came to die and pay that price. It is all of God. It originates with God. It ends with the glory of God. It is all carried out in God. Now let's pick up in v 14 with the lifted-up Son of Man.

John 3:14–21 — ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

PRAY

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We have the primary focus in **v 14** of salvation from the righteous judgment of God found in looking to Christ alone. He is the singular cure for the snake-bite of Holy God's judicial death penalty. Flowing immediately out of that with the conjunction **for**, we understand that God's life-giving love chases down unrighteous and unmerited sinners, not good men who have something to offer God. There are none of those. Laying hold of the unbridgeable chasm between us and a Holy God that is overcome by God's love through Christ shows the magnitude of his love and how transformative it is. Out of his love he pursued sinners to drag them out of the domain of darkness and bring them into his kingdom. It is this transformative love that the Apostle Paul prays we comprehend with all the saints—the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.

Then **v 17** begins with another conjunction. We are first to understand the magnitude of God's love in that while we were still rebellious sinners, Christ died for us. In **v 17** we are secondly to understand that not only did we not earn it, we never could. We are under condemnation—the same condemnation they were under in the wilderness when Moses was told to lift up the serpent, the same condemnation Adam and Eve came under. It is the condemnation of sin. Our reality of being condemned is shown in the negative that follows the conjunction.

For Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. Why? God is holy and sin is an offense that merits death. So understanding that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, is coming into the world, it would not surprise us if he were coming to condemn sinners. We deserve it. Why isn't he coming to do that? Because we are condemned already, as 18 says. Condemnation is already attached to every human soul. Nothing new, no additional action, no further pronouncement from God is needed. Apart from Christ, every single soul in the world is under condemnation. We are already there.

When did the condemnation of sinners occur? It occurred in Adam, in Genesis 3. We sinned in Adam; we all died in him; we were all condemned in him, and Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden. Condemnation is the inescapable default for every human soul. We are not born neutral. So Jesus did not come to condemn the world—that action was taken long ago. And that is our problem. In order to move from the default of deadly condemnation, intervention is required. That is what the next phrase tells us: the Son did not come into the world to condemn us, but in order that the world might be saved through him. He has come to take our condemnation. He takes it on himself; he absorbs the wrath of God so that you do not endure the wrath consequent to your condemnation.

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This is the only way to be saved from the condemnation in which we are born. It comes through faith in Christ, which is what we see at the beginning of v 18. Whoever **believes** in him is not condemned. As we have been told since the prologue, here we have another emphasis on faith as the instrumental cause that delivers us into Christ and out of the wrath of God.

The Son of God is God the Father's gift to us: God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. The exclusivity of salvation in Christ has stirred up anger for centuries. We see it in our multicultural society, where people are terribly offended at the clear revelation of Scripture that salvation is found in Christ alone. There is no salvation in Muhammad. Nor in the imaginary gods of the progressive left. The world we live in celebrates what is a primary indicator that we remain under condemnation. God's pursuing love overcomes and delivers from sin.

This generation destroys the concept of love with catchphrases, such as, "love is love," hardening people in what produces death upon death. This is why it is important that we understand John 3:16 in context. It overcomes our condemned sin; it doesn't anesthetize us in it. For those who turn in faith to Christ, our souls soar when we read **Romans 8** — There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

That is the positive! He didn't come to condemn us, but that we should not perish, but have eternal life. Well, that sounds wonderful! What could go wrong with that? The light of Christ just come into the world, and people realize that they were hopelessly condemned and rushed to embrace Christ and turn from wickedness. There is nowhere in the Bible that says anything like that, and this is no exception. In fact, we see the depth of our depravity in that while Jesus, the Light of the World, has come to redeem us, we hate the light of his truth and holiness, and run toward greater darkness in order to hide and conceal our sin.

Just like Nicodemus, we have a moral problem, a holiness problem. That problem is rooted in what we love. Men love the darkness because their deeds are evil. We imagine ourselves to be good people, acknowledging that we are imperfect, but we think our good outweighs the bad. But verses 19 and 20 paint a condemned picture of us. Indeed, consider the whole of the 3rd chapter as he describes those who have **not been born again**, and remained lovingly devoted to their sin:

- They cannot see the kingdom of God.

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- Cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- They choose unbelief. It's not that you can't believe, but that you won't believe, because of your corrupt nature.
- They choose rebellion against God. You will not receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- They are in a state of spiritual death right now— they are perishing.
- They stand condemned by God already.
- They love darkness and love their sin.
- They do evil and wicked things.
- They hate Christ, who is the light of the world.
- They do not come to Christ, the light.
- They do not obey the Son of God.
- They shall not see life.
- The wrath of God abides on them.

So, you see, the condemnation of sin does not come just because of what I do, but because of what I am. In a very real way, the condemnation is owing to what I love. Follow with me: I don't become a sinner after I sin. I am a sinner at the core, and my sinful deeds are expressions of who I am by nature. I sin and rebel against God because I am a sinful rebel. I love my sin and hate God.

Someone might immediately push back against that and say pastor I can shamefully acknowledge that I love my sin too much, and I'm not proud of that. But I don't hate God. That's not who I am. But that's not true. God, the Judge, has already ruled, and judged that not to be true everyone who does wicked things, who sins, hates the light.

Light is a metaphor for the holy Son of God. We can't acknowledge v 19 – yes, at times I love the darkness of my sin — but deny v 20 — but I don't hate the light of Christ. I would never do that. There are only two categories: the **first**, those who love sin and hate God. The **second**: those who love God and have been given a new heart to love obedience to God. Loving God and obeying God go together. If we love him, we love to obey him.

This is one of the great indicators of being born again. ***Am I making progress in the love of God that is demonstrated by my love of obedience to God?*** We're not talking about sinless perfection. We're talking about hating sin and turning from it. There is a battle between the sinful nature and the

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new heart. And we may not be as engaged in that battle against sin as we ought to be. But the soul that can continue to love his sin with no concern about offending God has every reason to be concerned about whether they have been born again. Though a believer fall into sin, though he pursue it, there is the convicting work of the spirit that produces a repentance that leads to life.

So rather than conceal sin, he runs to the light to confess his sin to God, who is faithful and just to forgive sin and cleanses from all unrighteousness. He rushes to be restored to fellowship with the Savior whom he loves and who loves him.

Two points of application here:

First, consider verse 16 in light of this default position of condemnation and hatred of God. To paraphrase John Calvin, there is nothing in the world, and there is nothing in one of us who are under condemnation and haters of God that would merit his life. And so how does that shape your heart to hear that God so loved you that he gave his son to pull you out of that domain of darkness as Colossians 1 said in the call to worship? Nothing in you attracts the love of God, but all in you secures his condemnation of your rebellion. Yet God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to redeem you. It is not that you made a good decision to turn to Christ, but that the Father sent him on a rescue mission to save a sinner, such as yourself.

Second, there are people that I love who are apart from Christ, who are living under the false notion that they can spend their lives however, they want to at this point, living for pleasure, living for themselves, and at some point down the road, after they have had all the fun they want, they'll rush to Christ so as to avoid condemnation. They acknowledge that they love their sin now and hate the light that exposes it, but they think they will someday stop hating their sin, perhaps at the last minute, and win some poker game with God. We must compel them to come to Christ and be reconciled to God. Perhaps you know someone like that. I know several. We are to be loving truth tellers and gospel proclaimers. The condemnation is not something that is coming, but that already abides, and urge them to flee to Christ, who has come on rescue mission because of his great love.

To close this incredible encounter, consider v 21 and this incredible promise filled with eternal life: Whoever does what is true comes to the Light. As bleak and dark as the condition of everyone outside of Christ is, those who come to him will learn to walk in his ways, and will display, they will demonstrate that they have been given a new heart by God. He works in them to produce the

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character of Christ. It ***is possible*** to love God and walk in his ways. But never through any fleshly effort of your own. Such a transformation is carried out in God and his redeeming love. You must be born again. You must be given a new heart. The old heart of stone loves sin, and hates God and the things of God. It motivates us to hide from the light of God, just like Adam and Eve did after they sinned in Genesis 3. When you are born again, you receive a new heart that loves God and hates sin. Because Christ absorbs your condemnation and gives you his life, the motivation is to run to Christ, bow before him and spend your life giving him praise, glorifying him, serving him because you have your eyes opened to see the depraved, dark domain from which he rescued you. All through his unmerited love. All because of his atoning sacrifice on his cross. All to the glory of Christ alone.

PRAY

John 3

PHYSICAL BIRTH/FLESH - CONDEMNED
SPIRITUAL BIRTH - LIFE ETERNAL

descriptors of spiritual death, condemnation, separation from God

DESCRIPTORS OF LIFE/NEW BIRTH

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he **cannot see the kingdom of God**." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he **cannot enter the kingdom of God**." ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but **you do not receive our testimony**. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and **you do not believe**, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And **as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up**, ¹⁵ that whoever **believes** in him may have **eternal life**."

UNBELIEF

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** in him should not **perish** but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to **condemn** the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever **believes** in him is not condemned, but **whoever does not believe is condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: **the light has come into the world**, and people **loved the darkness** rather than the light because **their works were evil**. ²⁰ For everyone who **does wicked things hates the light** and **does not come to the light**, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is **true** comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

PERISH/PERKAI

CONDEMNED

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

³¹ He who **comes from above is above all**. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who **comes from heaven is above all**. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet **no one receives his testimony**."

³³ Whoever **receives his testimony** sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever **believes in the Son has eternal life**; whoever **does not obey the Son shall not see life**, but the **wrath of God** remains on him."

DOES NOT OBEY CHRIST

SHALL NOT SEE LIFE - FATHER'S GOD RESIDES ON HIM

FEELING

HEART OF FLESH LOVES EVIL

HEART BORN AGAIN LOVES TRUTH AND GLORIFIES GOD.

ALL YOU CAN DO IS BELIEVE IN CHRIST - LOOK AND LIVE.

LOVE DARKNESS DO EVIL WICKED THINGS HATES THE LIGHT (CHRIST) DOES NOT COME TO THE LIGHT

Y2 REVELATION