

THE AIM OF THE INCARNATION
(John 3:17-21)

17 *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

18 *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

19 *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

20 *For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

21 *But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

John 3:17-21

Jesus has now articulated to Nicodemus his mission statement. Here is why I came into the world Nicodemus: I have come into the world to save believers. And furthermore, I have come to save whosoever believes. If a Gentile believes, I will give to him eternal life. If a Jew believes, I will give him eternal life. Jesus didn't say, God so loved Israel that he gave his only Son. Rather, he said, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

Now in revealing to Nicodemus the purpose of his coming into the world, you will notice that he does so first in a positive way in verse 16 and then in a

negative way in verse 17. In other words, here is why I did come. And then, here is why I did not come.

I did come to save. I did not come to condemn.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

John 3:17

Jesus did not come to condemn the world.

Now let me say that the word that is translated condemn here is *krino*. And *krino* can mean either to judge or to condemn. Judging means simply making an assessment of things whereas condemning means to make an adverse assessment.

Here your translators have properly translated the word “to condemn.” You will notice how the word condemn is set off against the word save. Jesus did come to save, but he did not come to condemn.

So we would have to conclude from this verse that Jesus did not come into the world to either cause the world to be condemned or to pronounce or execute condemnation. It was not a terrifying thing when Jesus showed up as a baby in a manger. And this should demonstrate that he did not come into the world in fiery judgment. When he performed his public ministry, he didn’t strike them with lameness. Rather, he healed their lameness. He came to save and not to condemn.

I can’t think of any harm that Jesus ever did to anyone while he was on the earth. He only did good

because he came into this world to save not to condemn.

They brought him a woman caught in adultery and he refused to pronounce condemnation on her. There was a woman at the well (John 4) who had five husbands and the one she was living with was not her husband. But Jesus came to save her and not to condemn her.

When Jesus went to the cross, he went to save. His thoughts were not on condemning but on saving and forgiving. While he hung on the cross he said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

His earthly mission was clearly a saving mission. He chopped off no heads. But he changed many hearts. And so, Jesus said,

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Now some find it difficult to reconcile this verse with John 9:39.

And Jesus said,

For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

John 9:39

Now John uses the same Greek word, *krino*, here and in John 3:17. But notice that the translators

have translated it to condemn in verse 17 and to judgment in John 9:39. And I think they have properly captured the difference in meaning.

In John 3:17, John is saying that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. But in John 9:39, he did come into the world to judge it. And here we have to make the distinction between condemning and judging.

Jesus did not come to condemn, but by necessity his words declared the condition of men and showed them their duty and their danger. And in this sense his words rang out in judgment of right and wrong.

Unbelievers are condemned already.

It seems that it was not necessary for Jesus to come into the world in order to condemn it. It was condemned already.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:18

Here we have the principle of inherited sin implied. Although it is not stated here, it certainly implies that mankind was thoroughly guilty before Jesus ever arrived on the earth. They were condemned already.

We know from Romans 5 that man (all men) is guilty by virtue of Adam's sin. And the guilt and

condemnation of mankind was settled long ago in the garden. Death passed upon all men.

Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation . . .

Romans 5:18

Now clearly, Jesus did not have to come into this world to execute condemning judgment upon men. He could have sent angels to grab men by the nap of the neck and bring them to the edge of the lake of fire. And he could have easily executed judgment upon them by the mere power of his Word.

And furthermore, it was not necessary for Jesus to become a man to execute judgment. He could have remained in heaven in his divine authority and cast people into hell.

And so,

God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already . . .

John 3:17, 18

Notice here that John divides the world of men into two categories: those who believe and those who do not believe. Now this is only one of the ways that men are divided in the Scriptures. There are sheep and goats (Matthew 25:33); there are those that do evil and those that do truth (John 3:20, 21); there are the righteous and the unrighteous. There are those that endure to the end and those that fall away.

But here in this passage, Jesus contrasts those who believe with those who do not believe.

Believers are not condemned.

He that believeth on him is not condemned.
John 3:18

This is a universal truth. Whoever believes is not condemned. You will notice that it does not say, "Whoever is baptized." It does not say, "Whoever continues to offer sacrifices every Sunday in the mass." But it says, "Whoever believes."

Believing is the outworking of a changed heart. Believing is what the heart does when it is born again. Believing God is a sure sign of regeneration. And it results in justification.

Now our text says,

He that believeth is not condemned.

And that is the negative way to state it. The positive way to state it is to say, He that believes is justified.

Now we all know that there are many parts and many stages to the process of salvation. Some of them are eternal processes which occurred before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4) And some of the parts of salvation occur in time. And there is a logical progression of events and in some cases there is a chronological progression.

We certainly wouldn't say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be elect." This would suggest that the election is predicated on the believing. (This is the Arminian viewpoint.) We wouldn't say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and God shall decree your salvation." Obviously, at least to us, the decree of God precedes all things and is the driving force behind all things.

And again, we would not say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be born again." Jesus got the order right when he told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." Then he told him, "Whosoever believes."

But there are some parts of salvation that logically or chronologically follow faith. And that is why the Scriptures can rightfully say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." There are parts of the salvation process that follow faith.

We say that when a man believes he is converted. He passes from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. He passes from death to life.

We say that when a man believes he is justified. (Romans 5:1) And, we are talking about the legal condition of the man. And justification would seem to logically follow faith.

Certainly the full sanctification of a man follows faith. And so does glorification.

But our text says, *He that believeth on him is not condemned.* That is the logical and certain result of believing on Jesus.

Believers and unbelievers react differently to Jesus.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

John 3:19-21

When John says that light has come into the world he is referring to Jesus. Jesus is light in the sense that he is the revelation of God. He shows us what God is really like. He is the objectification of divine purity and holiness. And he came into the world.

But there is a very great difference as to how men react to Him. You will notice that in verse 18, the two groups of men are described as believers and unbelievers. However, in verse 20 and 21 they are described as those that do evil and those that do truth. Sheep and goats can be described in various ways.

- I. How those that do evil (unbelievers) react to Jesus in the world.

Those that do evil love darkness rather than light. This is their natural inclination, being a sinner.

Example: Have you ever been sleeping peacefully in the morning and your wife comes in and jerks back the curtains and blinding sunlight comes flooding in? And you cover your eyes and you say, “Shut those curtains.”

This is how sinners react to the coming of Jesus into the world. They recoil in horror because he comes shining the light of moral purity and holiness into their eyes. And of course, they are used to the darkness and the light blinds them. In addition to that, when Jesus turns the light on, these sinners have evil deeds scattered around the room. And so they scream at Jesus, “Get out. Get out. Get that light out of here.”

Example: Jesus came into the world exposing the sins of the Pharisees. He shined the light on their hypocrisy and they hated him for it. They were comfortable under the cover of darkness. But they were very uncomfortable and irate under the light.

So, here are two universal principles as to how evil doers (unbelievers) react to the light.

For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.

John 3:20

- A. They hate it.
 - B. They don't come to it.
- II. How doers of truth (believers) react to Jesus in the world.

But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

John 3:21

Those that do the truth are obviously synonymous to the believers of verse 20. They are also those who have been born again for they “see” the kingdom (John 3:3) and they have obviously “entered” (John 3:5) the kingdom.

These righteous ones react in a completely different way. They come to the light. The implication is that they love the light.

Now these righteous ones who do the truth love to have the light shined on them because they have some good deeds. They are not hiding evil deeds in the dark. Rather, their deeds are worthy deeds.

However, it is noteworthy that these who do the truth are only interested in manifesting their deeds in order to show what God has wrought in their lives. All who are born of God should recognize that it is God who works in them. Good works are never a reason for us to boast in ourselves. Rather, it is a reason to boast in what God has done.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10