

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Guilty As Charged John 3:17-21

Intro: We've now come to the passage that is *necessary addition* to the great and wonderful truths of **John 3:16**. Having announced this Gospel in a nut-shell, God's own Declaration of Independence of sinful humanity from the bondage, stain and penalty of sin; the obvious question immediately arises, "Yes, but what about all those who **do not** believe?" The verses we have now arrived at deal with this question and what they tell us is indisputable: that those who have not believed will not only perish but that they stand even now under God's condemnation (**17-21**).

17- condemn – to judge. John uses the idea of judgment to emphasize God's loving purpose for the world. John states that the reason the Father sent His Son into the world was **not** to condemn (**judge**) the world, but save it! The judgment referred to here is clearly adverse judgment (**condemned**). If the incarnate Word has come into a world of sinners, how could His judgment be anything other than adverse? But that is not the purpose for which He came. This may seem to directly contradict the Lord's statement in **9:39** but the context clears it up. What Jesus is saying in **ch9** is that His mere presence on earth brings judgment: those who are willing to admit their own spiritual blindness can find sight in Him while those who falsely claim to have spiritual sight will be made blind. Thus, the judgment that is passed on these individuals is not passed on them by Jesus – it is passed on them by their own choices.

Now, it's not that Jesus did not possess the divine authority to pronounce judgment on the world because **Dan 7:13-14**) clearly states that He did. But, that was not the particular authority Jesus came to earth to wield. To everyone's great surprise, Jesus came to earth to wield a very different kind of authority (**Mark 2:10**). Instead of pronouncing judgment, Jesus came to earth to pronounce *forgiveness*! Both His teaching and His work had brought forgiveness near to mankind. Truly, the Father sent His Son so **that the world through Him might be saved**.

Of course, having stated this wonderful truth, there is an inevitable **separation** that must be made between those who accept Christ's

forgiveness and those who **reject** it. But make no mistake; those who reject it are self-judged. The responsibility for their self-judgment cannot honestly be laid at the feet of the Savior of the world. If Jesus came so that those who believe on Him should not perish, how can those who reject His gift of eternal life do anything other than perish? It is imperative that we understand this basic truth: salvation implies judgment! They are two sides of the same coin. If there were no judgment, there'd be no need for salvation. The converse of this is equally true. No where does the Bible teach that all men will be saved whether they want to be or not but everywhere the Bible does teach that those who persistently turn their backs on God's salvation will be deprived of it as our text will bear out.

18- already – We mustn't think that when the Gospel is presented the person involved is standing on neutral ground. It's not that they can either choose their own way with a corresponding wrath and condemnation from God or they can go God's way with its corresponding joy and blessing. According to Scripture, man has *already made his choice*. People have already chosen their own way. Isaiah writes, "**We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all**" (Isa 53:6). Paul declares, "**There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God**" (Rom 3:10-11). Whether we like it or not, these things are true from God's perspective. We have all gone our own way. We have already committed the crime. Therefore, every one of us already stands under God's judgment.

Most people do not like this teaching. There is a video posted on line of a portion of a confirmation hearing for Mr. Russell Vought for the position of Deputy White House Budget Director. He was being interviewed by Sen. Bernie Sanders when the conversation took an odd turn into Mr. Vought's Christian theology.

Sen. Sanders: Let me get to this issue that has bothered me and bothered many other people. And that is in the piece that I referred to that you wrote for the publication called Resurgent. You wrote, "Muslims do not simply have a deficient theology. They do not know God because they have rejected Jesus Christ, His Son, and they stand condemned." Do you believe that statement is Islamophobic?

Vought: Absolutely not, Senator. I'm a Christian, and I believe in a Christian set of principles based on my faith. That post, as I stated in the questionnaire to this committee, was to defend my alma mater, Wheaton College, a Christian school that has a statement of faith that includes the centrality of Jesus Christ for salvation, and...

Sen. Sanders: I apologize. Forgive me; we just don't have a lot of time. Do you believe people in the Muslim religion stand condemned? Is that your view? When Vought attempted to continue his defense, Sen. Sanders interrupted...

Sen. Sanders: I understand that. I don't know how many Muslims there are in America, maybe a couple of million. Are you suggesting that all those people stand condemned? What about Jews? Do they stand condemned too? The rub of the video was that Sen. Sanders voted not to confirm Mr. Vought solely based on his constitutionally protected faith. But this exchange speaks to the core truth of our text – the fact that sin has consequences and one of them is alienation from God and a second would be the inevitability of God's judgment on that sin.

We can expect the world to balk at the declaration of their own sin but certainly not anyone who knows the Bible. Sadly, there's an insidious false doctrine that has plagued the Body of Christ for almost 2000 yrs:

universalism. The basic tenet of universalism is that all of humanity will be saved regardless of their belief or faith or lack thereof. They teach that there is no eternal hell, at least not for humans and that eventually everyone finds themselves in heaven. The Universalist believes that God's love trumps all His other characteristics, that His love prevents any possibility of an eternal condemnation. But, the doctrine of universalism doesn't just stand in direct conflict with the Gospel of Jesus Christ – it actually denies the Gospel and as such, it is nothing more than heresy! Our text is crystal clear.

First, John presents the positive: those who have believed in Jesus no longer stand in condemnation. Paul says as much in **Rom 8:1**. **Then**, John presents a negative truth which is somewhat astounding. The condemnation of sin is **not** a future possibility but a present **reality!** What people do in life now results in present "preliminary" judgment that actually determines what will happen when they stand before Christ on the final judgment day. **Why condemned?**

1st) They *refuse to believe* in Jesus – John emphasizes the enormity of this refusal by describing Jesus as the one and only Son of God. By using this terminology, John is emphatically declaring that Jesus Christ has the same nature as the Father. He's affirming the divinity of Jesus; He is one with and the same as the Father. When people refuse to believe on a Person such as this – they condemn themselves. In a gallery or museum where masterpieces of art are on display, it's not the art that is on trial – it's the visitors. The art doesn't hang there to be critiqued by every rube that walks through the door but the reaction of everyone who views the piece reveals their own taste (or lack).

It's the same with Jesus Christ. The person who dismisses Jesus or thinks Him unworthy of his faith and submission passes judgment on himself – not on Jesus. That person does not need to wait for the judgment day, the verdict has already been pronounced on him. There will be a final judgment day but that day will only serve to confirm the judgment that has already passed. We've already learned in the prologue that those who believe on Jesus become God's children but for those who refuse to believe there is no other alternative but self-incurred judgment.

This seems to be the hardest thing for people to do. There is a lot in the Gospel that most folks don't have trouble accepting: the existence of God; the fact of God's love or God's power, even that God has a purpose for their lives. But, when you talk about Jesus Christ as the Savior, as the One who died to save sinners, they shut down. It seems very few people are keen on giving up calling their own shots. They can't seem to get over the clear demand of Jesus Christ on Christians – that of total submission. Folks just don't like giving up control of their lives or at least the illusions of control. That's the thing – they refuse to surrender something that they don't even have in the first place.

19-20- light– 2nd reason they're condemned) They actually *prefer sin* – John's not saying that God has declared that everyone who does this is condemned. He's not concerned with God's sentence on sin here; he's just explaining to us how the process works. People choose the darkness over the light and that is why they are condemned. They shut themselves up in darkness, they choose to live in darkness; they cut themselves off from the light. Why? ***Because their deeds are evil.*** Immersed in the cesspool of sin, they have no desire to be disturbed. They refuse to be shaken out of their

comfortable sinfulness. They reject the light that comes to them and set their love on darkness.

We see this exemplified most clearly in the religious rulers in Jesus' day. These men were the acknowledged high-achievers of the people before Christ came. The law had been given and they were the ones who supposedly kept it. But when Jesus arrived, He was so much better than they were that next to Him their goodness looked pretty shabby. So, they hated Him. The end result was that they would rather kill Him, remove Him from their sight, than to allow Him to continue to expose the corruption that was in their own hearts and actually cure them of it.

3rd) They ***hate*** the light – hate is a strong word and yet, John uses it 12 times in his writings, accounting for nearly 1/3rd of NT occurrences. This is mainly because the sinful world not only hates God, but hates what He stands for. The conflict between good and evil is no halfhearted affair. The forces of evil have nothing but bitter hatred for God and all those who follow His will. One reason for this hatred is given here. To come to the light means to have one's darkness ***shown*** for what it is ***and*** to have it ***rebuked*** for what it is. No one likes this uncomfortable process, pernicious evildoers least of all. The fear of beneficial reproof keeps them away from the light.

Immorality = unbelief!

The condemnation is ***not*** merely that we fall short of God's standards of perfection. Condemnation is there because we do ***not*** even aim in the right direction. The truth is, in our natural state, we do not really ***want*** God's goodness.

21- *truth*– in contrast to the one who practices evil, John uses a curious phrase here: ***he who does the truth***. We might expect him to say “he who does good” or “he who tells the truth” but what's it mean to ***do*** the truth? In the OT, to “***do truth***” or to “***deal truly***” simply meant to ***act honorably***. There are actions that are true as well as words. Anyone who habitually performs the actions that can be described as ***true*** will come to the light. They have no reason to avoid the light. In fact, the true light is their reward (***Matt 5:8 – Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.***) The actions of such a person are not those that need rebuke or reproof but they are accomplished ***in (and through) God***. John's not saying that some people just naturally do what is right. He is in no way teaching salvation by works or nature. He has clearly stated the requirement for salvation in

Jesus' own words – the new birth is the only way to God and His kingdom. This is one who responds to the Gospel invitation and now has new life in Christ.

Condemned? Yes! But also **not** condemned. The gospel is the **good news** that although you and I and all men are born under the judgment of God, it is never necessary for anyone to **remain** there. Today there is a **way of escape**. What's made the difference? Jesus! Jesus has died. He's taken our sin upon himself and borne its punishment. He was condemned in our place. If you've not already put your trust in Jesus and in what He has done for you, will you do it today? Will you believe on Him?

Someone might say, "I've been thinking about it." Thinking about it doesn't cut it. The great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote that if you continue to think about it, "you will think yourself into hell." Another might say, "I am praying about it." The Bible does not ask you to pray about it either. If you're not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible calls upon you to **believe** on Him. That's all. That's the **only useful** response you can have. Immediate faith is what the Bible demands of you in the name of Jesus who died for you and rose again. Today God sends you this message, "The times of your ignorance I have winked at, but now I command all men everywhere to repent." I cannot promise you that if you refuse to believe you will ever have another chance to commit your life to Jesus. "Now is the accepted time," God says, "behold, now is the day of salvation." 😊