

No Condemnation

John 3:16-21

The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to live a life of perfect righteousness, and then to die a death of perfect obedience on the cross. It was the love of God that motivated this great act of grace toward undeserving sinners. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* The Lord God created this world; the Greek word translated “world” is *cosmos*; an orderly arrangement of things. Sin had intervened and disturbed the good purpose of God. But the Lord’s love for his creation would cause him to send his only Son to redeem sinners and in doing so to set things right.

At this point in the gospel of John there is an interesting correspondence between the concerns of the apostle Paul in his epistles and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord, in his encounter with Nicodemus, spoke of the need for regeneration. This new birth from above would be the beginning of a life that would never end. Salvation would be the granting of great blessings in this life, but the life which is given in the new birth is eternal. Jesus makes this point clearly, but notice the connection with our status as sinners *condemned* before God.

Condemnation is the opposite of justification. The apostle Paul makes much of our need for a alien righteousness, a righteousness that comes to us from above, from outside ourselves. The life that comes from above brings with it the removal of condemnation. Notice the teaching here. All are already condemned. *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.*

There is a misunderstanding here on the part of many. Some will say that it is simply not believing in Jesus that sends people to the eternal judgment of hell. This is true in the context of the full revelation of salvation teaching in the word of God. What the Lord is saying here is that because of sin, because men and women have broken God’s laws we are already condemned. We inherit this inclination to sin from Adam and we participate in the fallen condition of mankind. We all sin.

I suspect that many parents believe that their children are in “neutral” when they are born. They are not. All are condemned from the beginning and are sure to sin. Only the Lord Jesus was sinless. And, it is our sins that separate us from God. To fail to believe in Christ is to miss the remedy for sin. To believe in Christ is to depend on the only person who can take sins away.

Only Christ has satisfied the justice of God. Only Christ has lived a life of perfect obedience. Only Christ’s death is the acceptable punishment for sin. Therefore to believe in him is to have the condemnation that hangs over all of us lifted. To use Paul’s terminology we are justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ. We are regarded as people who have never sinned at all. Even the vilest may know that there is a way for sins to be washed away and for the sinner to become clean in the sight of God.

The evidence of regeneration is coming to God through Christ. This is the pattern seen in the words of Paul. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* Both the Lord and his apostle taught that eternal life must come from God above, and that with that life comes a status of innocence. Those who are in Christ will never be condemned. And both the apostle Paul and the Lord taught that a changed life will give evidence that the divine work has

been done.

Note the words of Paul and the words of the Lord. Paul wrote, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* And the Lord said, *“But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.* Only those who are “in” God can manifest the reality of a new life given from above.

by Joe Nesom