

Light Has Come into the World

John 3:19-21

Last time we asked the question, “Why do people reject God’s loving offer of salvation through Jesus Christ?” You would think that everyone would eagerly grab the life preserver that God has thrown out through the gospel (John 3:16): **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”** We saw God’s mission of love in John 3:16-17. God loved the world and gave His only begotten Son over to death on the cross for the purpose of saving lost people. Why would anyone not want the gift of eternal life rather than perishing? God has made it so simple to receive the gift, believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Look to Him and be saved.

But as we saw last time, God’s loving mission to save the world through Jesus Christ also brought about the unavoidable division of the world into those who believe and those who refuse to believe, between those who are saved and those who are condemned, between those who perish and those who have eternal life. The coming of Jesus did not cause the condemnation of the human race, sin did that. Rather it exposed it as our text today will show.

So in John 3:19-21 we see the more complete reason why people reject Christ: *they love their sin and they hate having it exposed by God’s light.*

Listen to our text, John 3:16-21:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

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

20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

In verse 19 we see that:

1. Jesus is the Light.

John 3:19a: **“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world ...”** John introduced Jesus as the Light in chapter 1 (1:4-5): **“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”** Later in this Gospel (John 8:12), Jesus states, **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”** (see also, 9:5; 12:46).

In the Bible, light is used symbolically in two main ways: First, it pictures God’s holiness and sinlessness. Paul says (1 Tim. 6:16) that God **“alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.”** In John’s first epistle (1 John 1:5) the apostle declares, **“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”** Darkness then, sometimes symbolizes Satan’s domain and sin as Paul says in Colossians 1:13, **“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”** (see also Acts 26:18).

Second, light can refer to spiritual illumination, whereas darkness refers to our spiritual blindness before we are saved (2 Cor. 4:3-4, 6):

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. ... 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God’s light is embodied in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, the only begotten Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. John has already told us (1:9), **“That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”** When He comes, the truth about all things comes: the truth about God; the truth about ourselves; the truth about the way of salvation; the truth about good; the truth about evil; the truth about heaven and hell.

When Jesus came into the world, His very presence exposed to the world God’s holiness and God’s truth. In John’s Gospel we see clearly that the light shines on all, and forces a distinction. As we saw in 3:17-18, even though Jesus did not come for the purpose of judgment, because of who He is, His very presence brought judgment and divided people. It showed that people are already condemned because of their sin.

Have you had that experience with Jesus Christ? Have you seen who Jesus is and instantly recognized, **“He is holy and I am not holy! I am under God’s judgment because Jesus is Light and I am in darkness!”**

When the light of Jesus exposes your darkness, you can go one of two ways. First, John presents the negative reaction:

2. Sinners love darkness.

John 1:19b: "...**men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**" This verse tells us some significant truths about sin. *First, sin is not just doing what is wrong; sin is loving what is wrong.* Sin is not just what we do, it goes deeper than external actions. It is a matter of the heart. It goes to what we desire and what we love. Jesus said (Mark 7:21-23),

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Our sin problem is far deeper than we ever imagined. The Bible does not teach that we are basically good people who need to overcome a few flaws in our character. Our root problem is that we *love* our sin rather than God's holiness. It's a matter of the heart, and the only remedy that goes deep enough is the new birth, which gives us new hearts that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

A second truth about sin that we see here is: *The reason that many people reject Christ is not intellectual, but moral.* Most unbelievers do not love darkness rather than light because they have thought it through carefully and concluded that darkness makes more sense. No, John points out, **"men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** Listen, it is true, people *like* sinning!

Aldous Huxley, the famous atheist of the last century, once admitted that his rejection of Christianity stemmed from his desire to sin. He wrote (*Ends and Means* [Garland Publishers], pp. 270, 273, cited in James Boice, *Genesis* [Zondervan], 1:236):

I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had not; and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning for this world is not concerned exclusively with the problem of pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to.... For myself ... the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political.

The main problem of mankind is that he loves his sin and he stands guilty before the holy Judge of the universe.

But the situation of loving darkness rather than light is far worse than just loving sin:

3. Sinners hate the light.

John 3:20: **“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”** Unbelievers do not just love darkness; they also *hate the Light!* And who is the Light? Jesus Christ. They hate the One who out of love offered Himself on the cross so that every sinner might not perish but have eternal life simply by believing in Him! They hate Him because He exposes their evil deeds.

A teacher assigned his fourth-grade students to write a topic sentence for the following phrases: “Sam always works quietly. Sam is polite to the teacher. Sam always does his homework.” One student wrote his topic: “I hate Sam.” (*Reader’s Digest* [November, 2007], p. 59).

So you see the progression here:

1) People do evil. Verse 19: **“their deeds were evil.”** Verse 20 **“everyone practicing evil.”**

2) People do not want their evil exposed. Verse 20 at the end: “. . . **lest his deeds should be exposed.**”

3) So people love darkness. In the darkness they hope to sin unexposed. Verse 19: “. . . **men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**”

4) And people hated the light. They hate Him because that’s where their sin gets exposed for what it really is. Verse 20 at the beginning: **“everyone practicing evil hates the light.”**

5) Therefore, they do not come to Jesus. The middle of verse 20: “. . . **and does not come to the light.** . . .”

This does not mean that all sinners do their evil deeds in secret. In our day, when people call good evil and evil good (Isa. 5:20), it’s become cool to flaunt your sin. People go on television and boast about their extra-marital affairs and multiple marriages, their drug use and their racial hatred. We have “gay pride” celebrations to boast in what God condemns as evil. But they only do this where the light of Christ is so banished that they can get approval from the people that matter to them. In other words, where darkness abounds publicly, you can sin publicly without coming into the light.

What these verses show is not that their sin never sees the light of day, but that these sinners do not come to the Light, to Jesus, because His holiness condemns their behavior as evil. Jesus Himself told His unbelieving brothers (John 7:7), **“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”**

The word translated “exposed” in verse 20 means to be convicted in a court of law. It was used of an attorney proving his case. Jesus uses it in John 16:8 when He says that the Holy Spirit “... **will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.**” Guilty criminals hate judges who convict them of their crimes, even though it’s not the judges’ fault. Guilty sinners hate Jesus because He convicts them of their sins.

J. C. Ryle (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* [Baker], 3:164) points out that eventually sinners will get what they desired while on earth: they loved darkness; they will be cast into outer darkness. They hated the light; they will be shut out from the light eternally. God will be perfectly just in condemning those who rejected Christ. They saw the Light, but hated it and turned away from it because they loved their sin.

But, there is another possible response to the light in verse 21. When Christ, the light of the world, begins to shine on a person’s life, it must either drive him further into the darkness or it must break him and lead him to repentance and faith.

4. Believers come to the Light.

John 3:21: “**But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.**” John does not mean that some have a natural bent toward practicing the truth or that doing so brings salvation. He has just made it plain that we all need the new birth and that salvation comes through believing in Jesus Christ (3:1-16).

Rather, John is describing two types of people in the world: on the one hand, those that have not believed in Christ avoid the light and hate it, because it exposes their sinful deeds. On the other hand, those that have believed in Christ gladly come to Him and give Him all credit for their good deeds, because they know that those good deeds came from God, who caused them to be born again (1 Pet. 1:3; James 1:18).

When verse 20 says, “**But he who does the truth comes to the light,**” it expresses not so much a single act but a principle of ongoing action. Why does he keep coming to the light? Because he knows that to be in the Light is the only way to have life, to live, and to escape the consequences of sin. The Christian knows that going to Christ is the only way to have sin forgiven, and to be able to appear acceptably before the Lord with a clear conscience. True believers willingly, gladly, and repeatedly come to the light of Jesus Christ in God’s holy Word in order to grow in Christlikeness and to give God glory for His work in their hearts. True believers read God’s Word over and over, allowing it to shine into the dark corners of their lives and expose the sinful thoughts and intentions of their hearts (Heb. 4:12). False believers avoid the Word and they find churches that don’t preach the Word to expose sin.

John Piper summarizes our text this way: “There is a kind of judgment that came into the world when Jesus Christ came into the world. And this judgment reveals that the guilt of not coming to Jesus lies in the heart of man that loves darkness and hates the light. But the grace of coming to Jesus comes from the heart of God. Or, to put it another way: *Unbelief is our fault, and belief is God’s gift.*” (DesiringGod.org, “This is the Judgment: Light has come into the World”).

The real question we need to answer as we close today is not “Why do some people reject Jesus Christ?” but, “Will I believe in Jesus Christ or will I stay in the darkness of my sin?” Today you have the opportunity to come out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Light is beautiful, He is forgiving, He is loving, He is holy, He is able to save you today.