

# Condemned!

by James Boice

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*The sermon emphasizes that people are condemned because they have not believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior and because they prefer sin over righteousness, but offers the good news of the gospel that there is a way of escape from condemnation through Jesus Christ.*

**Scripture:** John 3:16

**Topics:** "Condemnation", "Salvation"

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## Description

James Boice addresses the critical issue of condemnation in his sermon 'Condemned!', emphasizing that while God sent His Son to save the world, those who do not believe are already under condemnation. He draws parallels between human justice and divine judgment, illustrating that sin has consequences and that individuals have already made their choice to turn away from God. Boice highlights that condemnation stems from a refusal to accept Jesus as Savior and a preference for darkness over light. He urges listeners to recognize their need for salvation and to respond immediately to the gospel, as today is the day of grace.

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## Transcript

Welcome now to verses that are a necessary addition to the great and wonderful truths of John 3:16-17. Those verses tell us that "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." When this is said, however, the question immediately arises, "Yes, but what of those who do not believe?" The verses to which we now come deal with that question, telling us that those who have not believed are even now under God's condemnation: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

### Crime and Punishment

Most men and women do not like this teaching. Yet it is a fact that sin has consequences and that one of these is alienation from God and God's judgment.

On one level at least we recognize this in purely human affairs. Some years ago I developed an interest in Russian literature and began to read the great Russian novels. Among them were the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Most of Dostoevsky's novels are great by almost any standard, but the one that has remained

uppermost in my mind over the years is Grime and Punishment. This is the story of a young student in Russia who commits a serious crime. His name is Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov is poor and needs money; therefore he murders an elderly pawnbroker who, he argues to himself, is of use to no one and whose life really doesn't matter. As the result of his crime Raskolnikov is launched upon what he thinks is going to be a prosperous life. Yet in the novel there is a relentless outworking of judgment for Raskolnikov's act. Punishment follows crime. The novel's point is that the young man stood condemned from the moment in which he performed the act.

Most who read the novel recognize the justice of its plot, but the far more serious fact is that the same principles apply spiritually. We must not think, if we are to take the witness of Scripture seriously, that when the gospel is preached to a man or woman the person involved is standing upon what we may call neutral ground. It is not that he can either choose his own way with a corresponding wrath and condemnation from God or that he 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. Thus, as 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; cf. Ps. 14:1-3).

We may not like it, but whether we like it or not, these things are true from God's perspective. We have gone our own way. We have already committed the crime. Therefore, every one of us already stands under God's judgment.

#### The Case for the Prosecution

At this point, however, we come to a second question. We have already asked, "But what of those who have not believed or will not believe?" We have seen that these are under God's wrath. But now we ask for what reasons. Why is man condemned in his present state? The answer to this question is really the case for the prosecution against man and leads us to the second half of the verse I read earlier and to those that follow it.

The first answer to why people are condemned is that they have "not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). What is the name? The name is: Jesus. And what does "Jesus" mean? The answer to that question is to be found in the words of the angel to Joseph when the name was originally given to his parents before Jesus' birth. The angel said, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The first two letters of the name are the first two letters of the great Old Testament name for God, Jehovah. The remaining letters are from the word for "save" or "salvation." Thus, the whole name means "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah will save." It follows then that when John says men are condemned because they have not believed on the name of the one and only Son of God, he means they are condemned because they will not have the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

This is the hardest thing for people to do. If you have witnessed to other people about the gospel, you know that there is much in the gospel that they do not have trouble accepting. Most people do not have difficulty believing in the existence of God. The Bible recognizes this indirectly when it says that only fools deny it (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). Most people do not have difficulty accepting the fact of God's love or God's power. Many people will believe that the same God of Love, who created them, also has a purpose for their lives. If they are not cynical because of circumstances, many will even listen to you talk about Jesus Christ so

long as you talk about him as a man who came to teach a high system of morality and to set an example for us to follow. However, if you talk about the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior, as the One who died to save sinners, there you will find hostility and vigorous rejection.

I know of one young woman whose life is an illustration of this principle. She was a student at the University of Pennsylvania. While there she attended a series of Bible studies on the life of Christ. She agreed with many of the truths that were brought out. But when it came to the point at which Christ was held up as the Savior of a fallen, sinful race as the only way in which a man or a woman can come to God, this young woman rebelled. She said, "I can accept the rest, but I cannot accept this business about Jesus Christ. I will not admit my need of him to be my Savior."

The second reason given by John for God's condemnation of men who have not believed in Christ occurs in verse 19. He says, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." This means that people are condemned not merely because they have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior--this could be attributed to a lack of understanding--but also because they actually prefer sin. The light has come, but they have turned from it. They have done so because their deeds are evil.

From the account of the reaction of the rulers of the Jewish people to Jesus during his lifetime, we can understand how this works. These men were the acknowledged high-achievers of the people before Christ's coming. The law had been given. They were the ones who supposedly had kept it. But when Jesus Christ came, he was so much better than they were that next to him their goodness looked tarnished, like Christmas tinsel does in February. So they hated him. The result was that they preferred to have him killed, removed from sight, rather than allow him to expose the corruption that was in their own hearts and cure them of it.

The condemnation is not merely that we fall short of God's standards of perfection. The condemnation is there because we do not even aim in the right direction. We do not really want God's goodness.

The following illustration will help to make this clear. Imagine a child who is learning to throw a ball. He is to throw it, and his father is to catch it. The child is given the ball. He throws it. But instead of the ball going directly to the father it goes off about thirty degrees to the right. The father says, "You'll have to do better than that; I can't be running after the ball all afternoon."

The child replies, "But you're too far away. Come in closer." So the father moves in about ten feet. The child throws again, and this time the ball goes off about thirty degrees to the left. "You're still too far away," the child says. The father comes closer, but once more the ball goes off at an angle. Finally, the father is standing right in front of the child; the child throws, but the ball goes in the other direction entirely. What is the trouble? The trouble is not entirely with the distance between the child and the father, although that is part of it. The problem is with the child's aim.

In the same way, the problem with sinners is not merely with the great distance between our own level of conduct and God's standards. The trouble is also that we do not go in the right direction even when we aim at those standards.

Finally, John lists one more reason for God's condemnation of the human race. It is because men hate the light. The light has come and men hate it. Does that describe you? Or are you one who is allowing God to draw you to the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ?

There is an emphasis upon light in this passage. John mentions light five times. "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." According to these verses, people do not like the light; instead, they prefer darkness. If you ever come to the point where you do love the light, it must be because God has already begun a new work in you.

### Not Condemned

That leads to our final point. Condemned? Yes! But also not condemned. For 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 has made the difference? Jesus! Jesus has died. He has taken your sin upon himself and borne its punishment. He was condemned in your place. Thus we can read, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Let me tell you of one young man who learned this. His name is David Hoyt; his story, like that of Christopher Pike (see the chapter on John 3:7-8), is told in Edward E. Plowman's book *The Jesus Movement in America*. David was a member of a hippie community in California when he met Kent Philpott, a Golden Gate Baptist Seminary student. David was already into one of the eastern religions, but through Kent's ministry he began to attend a series of Bible studies that met in the basement of the Krishna temple during the guru's absence. The studies spoke to him. He began to see himself as he really was. His own testimony is that while, on the one hand, it looked as though he were seeking the light through the mysticism of the eastern religions, actually he was preferring the darkness of his own soul to God's truth. Dissension among members of the temple bothered him. He could not seem to find inner peace. He prayed, asking God to show him the truth.

The next morning while everyone was at certain rites, the universal altar, which contained representations of the world's religions, caught fire in the basement. David and the others rushed down in time to salvage the only article that had escaped the flames--a Bible. David received it as an answer to his prayer. He opened it and stumbled upon the very passage we have been studying: There he saw his own heart. He was one who had been preferring the darkness to the light. He saw God's great love, a love that had sent Jesus Christ to bear his judgment. David said, "I was set free from an evil spirit that had kept me from the truth; I felt clean and whole for the first time in my life."

After that David Hoyt was used of God to reach many young people with the gospel.[1]

### Now Is the Time

Does the story of David Hoyt's conversion describe you? Have you believed in Jesus or are you still in the category of those who stand condemned? There are only two roads, two destinies. If you have 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 says, "Well, I have been thinking about it." Thinking about it will not do. That great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote that if you continue to think about it, "you will think yourself into hell." "I am praying about it," says another. The Bible does not ask you to pray about it either. If you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible calls upon you to believe on him. That is all. That is the only useful response. Immediate faith is what I, as a minister of the gospel, demand 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."

During the early days of the ministry of Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist launched a series of meetings in Chicago, with promise of the largest crowds that he had addressed up to that time. He was speaking on the life of Christ, and on the first Sunday night, October 8, 1871, he took as his topic the trial before Pilate. As he came to the end of his message he turned to Matthew 27:22, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" He concluded, "I wish you would take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week, and next Sabbath we will come to Calvary and the cross, and we will decide what to do with Jesus of Nazareth."

It may have been an artistic device. But speaking of it in later years, Moody called that conclusion to his morning's address the greatest mistake of his life. For even while Mr. Sankey was singing the final hymn--  
Today the Savior calls;

For refuge fly;

The storm of justice falls,

And death is nigh--

the fire engines began to sound on the street on their way to their first contact with the great Chicago fire in which Moody's hall was laid in ashes and in which it is estimated that over a thousand persons lost their lives. Moody never saw that congregation again, and some of those he spoke to that night undoubtedly died in that fire.

Make no mistake. The gospel is not for another time, another age, a more convenient moment. My business is not with tomorrows. Today is the day of God's grace. Look up and live! The Bible says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

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