

This Is the Judgment ■ Light Has Come into the World

by John Piper

This sermon delves into the concept of judgment that came into the world with Jesus Christ, highlighting the contrast between those who love darkness and those who love the light. It emphasizes that unbelief is our fault, while belief is a gift from God, leading to either magnifying God's justice in damnation or magnifying His grace in salvation. The focus is on the inner workings of unbelief and belief, revealing the need for self-awareness and reliance on God's enabling power.

Scripture: John 3:19, John 3:17, John 8:12, Matthew 5:16, Ephesians 2:8, 1 John 1:7, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 5:8, John 1:12

Topics: "Judgment", "Belief vs. Unbelief"

Description

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Transcript

It has been very encouraging to me, as I know it is to you, to know that people are being saved in these weeks as we live in the Gospel of John. And I got an email recently, and I'm starting this way just because of that. It reminded me that I should be more aware and let you be more aware that I know that the other campuses are there when I'm preaching here.

And so I say that to the downtown Sunday morning group and to the north Sunday morning group and to the north Saturday night group that when I pray right now, I include you, because there was a young man who came to Christ mightily through the video, through a campus where I wasn't present. And so the Word of God has power. Father, I pray now, I pray that on all the campuses, your Word would have divine power to destroy strongholds in people's hearts and minds of loving darkness and hating light.

Come do your mighty work. This is your Word, and your Word is powerful. Help me to be faithful to it.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen. Our focus in this message is on verses 19 to 21 of John 3, Gospel of John chapter 3. I'll tell you the main point up front. There is a kind of judgment that came into the world when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came into the world.

And this judgment reveals that the guilt of not coming to Jesus lies in the heart of man, and the grace of coming to Jesus comes from the heart of God. That's the main point of this text. Or to put it another way, the coming of Jesus into the world clarifies that unbelief is our fault, and belief is a gift of God.

Which means that if we do not come to Christ but eternally perish, we magnify God's justice in our damnation. And if we do come to Christ and have eternal life, we magnify God's grace in our salvation. That's the point of this text.

Now, my job for the next 30 or 40 minutes is to show you that in this text, so that you see it for yourself. That's called expository, so that we can then together exult over it, and that's called exultation, which is why we call preaching expository exultation, which is what we are now about to do. Let's set the stage for verses 19 to 21 by reviewing verses 16 to 18.

We can review it in three mighty and simple statements. Number one, God loved the world. Verse 16, for God so loved the world.

Statement number two, the act of this love is the giving of His Son, or the sending of His Son into the world to die. Verse 16 again, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. And we know that this is a giving unto death, because in verse 14, Jesus had just said, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

Like that, on a pole. And everywhere that the lifting up of the Son of Man occurs in this Gospel, that's what it's referring to. The lifting up on the cross in death.

So, the Father gave the Son to die for sinners. Number three, third statement of summary, the way that this sending of the Son is love is one, two, three, three things. One, it's His Son.

It's not a lamb. It's not a goat. It's not a bull that you can dispense with easily.

It's His Son. Paul said, He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. So, John underlines it.

Jesus underlines it. Paul underlines it. It's His Son.

So, that's what makes it love. Second thing that makes it love is that it throws open a wide door of eternal life to everyone who will believe. So, the second way is that it's not just costly for God, it's infinitely beneficial for us.

Eternal life is being offered here. And thirdly, it's love because the only thing you have to do in order to benefit from this love is believe. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes won't perish, but have eternal life.

So, to sum up, the love, the sending of the Son is love because it's deeply costly for God, it is infinitely beneficial for us, and it is absolutely free. All you have to do is welcome it as the most precious thing in your life. Now, there's a bridge from all that to verses 19 to 21.

And the bridge is found in 17 and 18. And best to see it starting in verse 18 and noting that in verse 18 the division of the house in verse 16, namely believers and unbelievers, perishing and living, is repeated in verse 18 and a different kind of language entirely is used. This is important.

Watch verse 18. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already. What's the difference between that and verse 16? The difference is, he's moving from life-death language to condemned-not condemned language.

He's moving into a courtroom. This is what a judge does. A judge pronounces sentence condemned off to the electric chair or not condemned, free.

So the language changed from perish and eternal life to condemned or not condemned. That's very, very significant. That shift in language was already signaled in verse 17.

Now look at verse 17. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn or judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. So verse 17 is shifting around the language from death and life and belief and unbelief to judgment hall, courtroom, judge, condemned, not condemned, guilty, not guilty.

And that sets the stage for what is following. Verse 17 raises this question. If Christ didn't come into the world to judge the world, and the word is just judge.

Condemned is a contextual translation for the fact that it's a negative judgment for almost everybody except those who believe. If Christ didn't come into the world to judge the world, then it sure looks like the world is being judged. And the way verse 18 handles that tension is with the word already.

Look at verse 18. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, and whoever does not believe is condemned already. He didn't come to do it.

It's done. Already. Which means, when Jesus came into the world, He did not come to neutral people who in response to Him, some would become pro-Jesus and some would become anti-Jesus.

He didn't come to a neutral world. There are no neutral people. Nobody is neutral toward Jesus.

He came to a world already condemned. You want to see this again in John, just drop down 20 verses or so to verse 36 of chapter 3. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God.

Say that word. Now what's the significance of remains? It means at that moment it didn't come. It's already there.

Just like the condemnation is already there in verse 18, the wrath is already there in verse 36. We're under it. That's us.

Jesus came not to take neutral people and divide the house. He came to rescue some guilty people who would believe in Him and the rest perish. That's the world He finds.

That's the world we live in. That's the world we are. Whether we stay that way depends on how we respond to Jesus.

He came not to make neutral people pro-Jesus, but to make guilty people not guilty and dead people alive. That's why He came. And it's all undeserved grace when it happens.

Now we're ready for verses 19 to 21, which is the focus. And the reason we had to do that, see clearly 16, 17, 18, is because a problem has been created. You may not feel it.

Jesus felt it, I think. He's going to make it worse in chapter 9, but I'll tell you what it is here and why I think He spoke, verses 19 and 20 and 21, the way He did. What's troubling is that even though verse 18 in a sense solves the problem that He didn't come to judge.

We're already judged. He didn't come to judge. Nevertheless, nevertheless, every time He opens His mouth, there's a division.

Some go that way to life. Some go that way to death. And it feels as though this is a kind of judgment that has come into the world.

Every time a Christian preacher or a witness on the street or in your family opens His mouth to say something commendatory about the Gospel, there's a division. Remember how Paul put it? My life, he said, and my message is a fragrance from death to death for those who are perishing and from life to life for those who are being saved. Paul felt it so keenly.

And then he said, who is sufficient for these things? I am sending people to hell or heaven. I mean, he really felt an unbelievable weight that as he spoke, the division was secured. And so even though he didn't come to judge, it looks like it's happening.

Now, let me read you. You can go there if you want. Chapter 9, verse 39, just to show you the problem is really there.

I'm not making this up. Chapter 9, verse 39, this is Jesus talking. For judgment, I have come into this world that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind.

Now, a superficial reader, I hope that's not you, would read 9:39. For judgment, I came into the world. And John 3, 17, God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world and say, contradiction, I'm out of here.

Let's go eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. Don't be that kind of superficial reader. Already in chapter 3, verses 19 to 21, Jesus is perfectly aware of what He's about to say in chapter 9 and He gets us ready to understand it right here.

And that's what we're going to tackle in verses 19 and following. So let's read it. Verse 19, And this is the judgment that light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because it works for evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. But, whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. What we have here is a new description of the division of the house in verses 16 and 18.

There the division was between those who believe and those who don't believe. Whoever believes is not condemned. Whoever does not believe is condemned already.

The division is between believers and unbelievers. The word belief never occurs in verses 19 to 21. It's gone.

We've got new words coming in here. Why? Because what Jesus is doing for us and this is where I think the sermon may be blessed of God to reveal your heart to you. What Jesus is doing here is laying bare the inner workings of unbelief.

Why do people not believe? What is the nature of unbelief? What is it at its core? Where does it come from? And then in verse 21, how about belief? Where does that come from? And what's its nature? That's what he's doing. He's leaving behind the words belief and unbelief, but he isn't leaving behind the issue. He's picking up on the word judgment and he's saying, this is a judgment.

There is a kind of judgment, he's saying. I'm coming into the world. Light, I'm light.

I'm coming into the world. And a judgment is happening and the judgment is happening in here. So that's what we want to look at.

Jesus is digging into our souls. I personally, over the years, find these kinds of passages of Scripture the most transforming. You know why? John Piper, and you too, does not know the nature of his soul or the nature of his heart or the nature of his inner being.

I do not know me. Neither do you. The world is constantly telling you your nature.

The world is constantly appealing to things it knows about you. The world doesn't have a clue what you really are. If you get your self-understanding from the world, you won't ever know who you are before God.

You won't ever know the real you and the real problems you face and the real nature that you have and the real struggles that are eternal and not just little teeny family struggles or little teeny work struggles. The world makes such a big deal and so do many pastors about things that are not the issue. This kind of text blows it all away and says, here's you.

Know yourself, Christian. And Christian, you're beyond this, but you're not beyond it, are you? The dynamics of unbelief here are what we struggle with every single day. We just have the Holy Spirit within us now and a new nature that can see the darkness and hate it and see the light and love it and yet the battle goes on till the day we die.

So this is relevant for those of you who are not believers. You need to know yourself and God may be pleased to shed light on your heart. And we believers, we need to know this because we struggle with what Jesus is about to describe.

So let's start with verse 19. This is the judgment. What? The light has come into the world.

Now let's just stop right there and get that clear. The light has come into the world. What is that? That's Jesus.

John, the writer of this Gospel, wrote in his first letter, God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. And he said in the very first verse of this Gospel, the Word was God. And then in verse 14, the Word became flesh.

What else could He be but the light of the world? And He says so in chapter 8 verse 12, I am the light of the world. What does that mean? Oh, we should meditate long over that. I am the light of the world.

Let me give you a few pointers that I think it means from meditating on these contexts. It means that Jesus is the sum of all truth. He said I am the way, the truth, and the life.

He means all truth is summed up in Jesus. Paul said in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If you want to know anything fully or truly, you must know it in relation to Jesus.

Which is why secular education is such a problem. Our students have to be supplying the key all the time. That unlocks what the teacher is saying.

The teacher can say a hundred amazingly true things and they're all wrong. They're all wrong. Algebra is wrong.

Chemistry is wrong. History is wrong. PE is wrong.

And of course we can learn from all that wrong stuff. But you can't know what it's about. You can't know the point.

You can't know where it came from, where it's going. What's it got to do with my soul? What's it got to do with why and how I live my life? Which are the big issues in life? When He comes, when Jesus comes, the truth about all things comes. Truth about God is in Jesus.

Can't know God without Jesus. Truth about ourselves. We can't know ourselves without Jesus, His teaching, His person.

Truth about the way of salvation comes. Can't know how to be saved without Jesus. The truth about what is good and beautiful, what is evil and ugly.

All the criteria that make something right or wrong, beautiful or ugly is in Jesus. How can the world know such things? He made them all. He decides what's good, what's right, what's wrong, what's true, what's beautiful, what's ugly.

It's all decided by Jesus. He made it. Makers decide.

We don't. Right thinking, right feeling, right doing, all defined by and measured by Jesus. This is some of what it means, I am the light of the world.

We Christians should never, ever, ever be ashamed of our Jesus. There is nothing greater than Christ. Shame at commending Christ simply means you're ignorant or temporarily chicken-hearted, blind, irrational, crazy, lost your mind.

He's truth. He's everything. He's what the world needs.

He's what the university needs. You don't need to be ashamed of this Jesus. All wisdom, truth is summed up in Him.

So, verse 19 says, there is a kind of judgment. How so? How so? How is it that when light, this light comes into the world, judgment happens? How is that? The rest of the text explains. This is, let's read it again.

This is the judgment that light has come into the world, and here's what happens. Here's the split. People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. Stop. Now that's the negative response.

Verse 21 is going to be the positive. Let's stay with the negative a minute. Let's know ourselves and who we are fallen under the wrath of God, under condemnation.

If you're an unbeliever, that's where you still are. If you're a believer, you're still contaminated by it and need to constantly own your true identity in Christ and put to death the old identity. So let's know ourselves here, believer or unbeliever.

Let's know ourselves. You can sum up what I just read about this person in five steps. Number one, we'll go from the bottom to the top.

Number one, their works, our works, works, what we think, we feel, we do, all that stuff is evil. Verse 20 at the beginning of the verse, it says so at the end of verse 19, their works were evil. In verse 20 at the beginning, they do wicked things.

Number two, they don't want this to be exposed. What we're thinking, what we're feeling, what we're doing, my whole life of evil, I don't want that to be exposed. So verse 20 at the end, lest his works should be exposed.

He doesn't want that to happen. So first there's evil, and then there's the fear and the desire that it not be exposed. Number three, therefore they love darkness.

It's safe. Verse 20 in the middle of the verse, look at it, and people loved the darkness rather than the light. This is a love affair.

Unbelief is at root a love affair. Love is a big word. He did not have to speak this way.

He could have stuck with belief language. We all tend to think, oh, believing in Jesus is a decision. Well, sort of.

I mean, underneath decisions are torrents of reality. And this is a description of them. There's love going on down there for all wrong things.

Darkness. I love you, darkness. I love you, darkness.

You are so safe. You love me so much. You protect me.

Number four, and therefore they hated the light. Verse 20 at the beginning, everyone who does wicked things hates the light. You got to.

You got to. All that stuff is going to look so horrible and shameful, and I can't stand that thought. I just got to keep loving the dark and pushing the light away.

And so number five, they don't come to Jesus. They don't come to the light. Middle of verse 20, and does not come to the light.

So there they are. Five steps. One, I'm doing evil stuff.

Inside, outside, I'm evil. Number two, I don't want that to be exposed. Number three, therefore I love darkness.

Number four, therefore I hate the light. Number five, I'm not coming. Look, I'm not coming.

I'm not believing. Believing and coming. And John, same thing.

So, this is Jesus' explanation of unbelief. Remember that. The division into two kinds of people, verses 19 to 21.

Same division as verses 16 to 18. Some believe, some don't believe, and now he's going into the inner workings of our soul. So, let's just linger here for a minute.

I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. What I mean by that is, my life is never fully in sync with the infinite worth and beauty of God.

Never. Never fully in sync with the beauty and the worth of God. God is always worthy of more than I give Him.

He's always worthy of more intensity than I feel for Him. Always worthy of more consistency of obedience than I give Him. Always worthy of more consistent mental work for Him than I give Him.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. Who does that? Raise your hand if you do that. All of you.

All at all times. Nobody. Because you don't, and I don't either.

We're sinners. And therefore, we're under wrath because God is so infinitely worthy of more than we give Him. And we dishonor Him every day of our lives, believer and unbeliever.

We do this. The difference is not that one is good and the other is bad. Simply.

The Holy Spirit's at work on believers. They are changing. But I've been a Christian since I was six.

I'm 63. I'm not optimistic about finishing without sin. I hope my sights are not too low.

I just love grace more a lot. Jesus says now that we dishonor the Lord every day. And the reason that people hate the light and love the darkness is this.

When by some amazing work of providence we begin to know ourselves sinful, it becomes either really angry-making or really fear-making that that might be exposed. Just imagine your whole life and all you did last week and all the weeks before just out there. Just out there.

This is why people don't come to Christ. This text says, lest their deeds should be exposed. Shame that is deserved is a horrible thing.

You ever been embarrassed to the point of just wanting to run out of the universe as a little kid, wetting your pants at school? I mean, that's nothing. What if everything were laid bare? This is why people don't come. It's just terrifying that I might actually have to live in absolute light.

Nothing hidden anymore. They don't come. They stay hidden.

Now, careful. That does not mean people don't commit public sins. You might draw the conclusion from what I just said.

Oh, people are afraid that their sin will be exposed, so they never do it in public. What? Why? Why? If it's so terrifying to come into the light with your sin, why are sins so publicly flaunted in our day? There's a real simple reason. As long as the public banishes the light, there are enough people to admire the sinful behavior that you don't feel shame, but approval.

As long as the light of Christ is kept out of the sphere in which you're acting out your evil, public sin is in the dark. Public doesn't mean light. Public means dark people observing dark behavior and liking it because it confirms their own.

But if God shows up, we call this revival, revival, moving on a people in a church or in a community, and suddenly Christ in all of his standards, the holiness of God in all of its perfection begins to rest with some weight upon the world, you know what happens? People are either driven to Christ because of the horror of their own shame or they're driven away further into darkness and the ways divide and that's the judgment that this verse is talking about. Let's close by looking at the positive response. This is where I believe most of you are and I hope the rest of you will be.

Verse 21, but, this is the alternative from hating the light, loving the dark and not coming. This is the alternative. Verse 21, but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

Now, I think this sentence does not express a single act but a principle of ongoing action. Let me paraphrase it so that you can see it. This is partly rooted in tenses that I can't show you and partly contextually, partly theologically.

This is a judgment call. You've got to weigh it. I think what was just described here is a principle of ongoing action, not just one thing that happens in your life.

So, let me paraphrase it so you can hear what I mean. It would go like this. Whoever goes on doing what is true, that is acting in accord with the light, will always come to the light and not run away from it and the reason he will come is so that it will be clear that this ongoing behavior, this doing of what is true, has been the work of God in Himself.

That's the way I think you should read it. In other words, the ultimate contrast here between verse 21 person and verse 19 and 20 person, the ultimate contrast is not that one hates the light and the other loves it. That's true and hugely important.

It's just not the ultimate contrast. The ultimate contrast, secondly, is not that one believes and comes to Jesus and the other doesn't believe and doesn't come to Jesus. That's true.

It's just not the ultimate contrast that Jesus is drawing out. This verse takes a surprising turn at the end, doesn't it? You kind of, whoa, where did that come from? And that surprising turn at the end of verse 21 is to point to the real ultimate difference, the real ultimate contrast between the person of 19 and 20 who's loving the dark and hating the light and refusing to come to Jesus and the person of verse 21 who's coming to the light and loving the light and discovering how horrible and hugely ugly the darkness is. He's

coming! What's the real, final, decisive, most important, ultimate contrast between these two? The ultimate contrast is that the believer, the one who comes, loves the light, in verse 21, is coming because God is enabling him to come and God is working in him all these things that are making him feel in sync with Jesus and not threatened by Jesus.

Let's read it again. Look at it carefully. Whoever does what is true, so you're thinking, you're feeling, you're acting, are conforming to the value of Jesus, the true value of Jesus.

Whoever does what is true comes to the light so that, and here's the ultimate contrast, he's got a design in coming that I've devoted the last 30 years of my life to trying to help people understand, so that it may be clearly seen. That's what he wants. Oh, I want something to be seen! He's not just coming so that he gets saved.

He's not just coming so that his sins will be forgiven, so that he won't go to hell and go to heaven. Yes, amen! We love that. Oh, what would we do without that? That's not what this verse says.

This verse says he's passionate about something being seen in his life. What? So that it may be clearly seen that his works, his thoughts, his feelings, his deeds, his whole newness has been carried out in God. Meaning, in the power of God.

In the enabling of God. In the moving of God. Here's the difference between the lover of the darkness and the lover of the light.

In the darkness, I'm king! I do exactly what I want in the dark. Pride is the number one killer. I live in the dark where I call the shots and nobody in the dark can criticize me.

Because you can't even see what I'm thinking and feeling. But the person who's had that pride just snapped right in half. And said, your only hope is grace, buddy.

And I'm here. I'm for you if you'll have me. If you'll just quit that stuff and break like a child and receive me like a little baby, I'll be there for you forever.

Yes, you'll be a welfare case forever. And I will be your all-providing shepherd, lover, king, friend forever. You'll be lowly, I'll be up.

Is that okay? Is that a deal? And these people say, I want that to be seen more than I want anything! I want the world to see that I am saved by grace. I want the world to see that I have been changed by God, not me. This is Jesus saying, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and give glory to whom? Tell me.

Your Father in heaven, God. That's what this person is. That's newness.

That's radical. That is God-centered, Christ-exalting, and rooted right here in verse 21. So, I gave you the main point at the front end of the sermon.

I'm going to repeat it here. We'll be done. The main point of this text is there is a kind of judgment that came into the world with Jesus Christ.

This judgment reveals that the guilt of not coming to Jesus is in our hearts, and the gift of coming to Jesus comes from God's heart. Or, to put it another way, unbelief is our fault, and belief is God's gift. Or, one last

way, this ties in with the point that I've just made.

If a person so loves the dark, so hates the light, that he will not come to Jesus, the light, he will perish, and thus magnify the justice of God in his damnation. And if a person has, by grace, fallen in love with the light, been willing to let all the absolute horrors of his life, his mental life, his heart life, his sex life, his physical life, his money life, his killing life, be exposed and forgiven and cleansed and justified, and thus willing to come to the Savior, he will go into life magnifying the grace of God, which is what that it might be clearly seen that this was wrought in God. So my invitation to you, Christian and non-Christian, is come to Christ.

Take the risk. It's not an ultimate risk. It feels like a risk.

You mean with all the stuff that for the last 20, 30, 40, 50 years, my mountain of sin is higher than you can imagine, John Piper. That's true, but it's not higher than God can imagine, and it's not higher than the cross of Christ. So just let it go.

Take the shame. He will wipe that away. You will not live in shame.

Let's pray. So God, I pray now for those worshiping and praying right now, 11 o'clock downtown, 9 o'clock downtown, 11 o'clock north, 9 o'clock north, Saturday evening north, and right here in this room, I pray for life. I pray that we would fall out of love with the darkness and fall into love with light.

I pray that we would be willing to let all of our lives be exposed as the sinners that we are and that we would know that the grace of verse 21 is offered freely to all. Oh, grant that we would come. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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