

John 3:16-21

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.

Background

The word “world” is used three different ways in the New Testament.

- The physical universe God created (Acts 17:24).
- The evil, satanic value system opposed to God (1 John 2:15-16).
- Humanity. This is the meaning in John 3:16–17: **“this is how God loved the world,”** referring to His love for all people.

The phrase “one and only Son” (used of Jesus in John 3:16, 18) comes from the Greek word *monogenes*. It doesn’t mean Jesus had a beginning, but rather emphasizes His unique relationship with God the Father. The word “perish” in John 3:16 doesn’t mean cease to exist; it means to be lost or ruined forever. Unbelievers continue to exist after death but are eternally separated from God.

Teaching Points

1. The benefits of Christ’s death are sufficient for all people, but only effective for some people.

Verses 16-17 show that God loves the world and sent His Son to save it, not to condemn it. But this doesn’t mean everyone is automatically saved. Though Jesus’ death is sufficient for all, it’s only effective for those who believe. Salvation is offered to all, but only received by those who accept it through faith.

2. The judgment of God is upon those in darkness who deliberately turn away from the light.

Verses 19–20 explain that people are condemned because they reject the Light of the world, Jesus. They prefer darkness to avoid exposing their evil deeds. Romans 1 says this rejection is intentional and leaves them without excuse. It's like someone trapped in a dark cave and deliberately turning away from the lights of the rescue team. People remain condemned because they refuse to accept Jesus. God's judgment rests on those who willfully reject the Light.

Application

1. Are you moving toward the light, or away from it?

This application applies to both unbelievers and believers.

Unbelievers are either like the self-righteous Pharisees who reject the Light. Or they are like Nicodemus, a sincere seeker who moved toward the Light and found salvation.

Believers are also either moving toward or away from the Light. When you became a Christian, you went from darkness into God's wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). But if you're hiding sin, you're drifting into darkness. Confess your sin and turn back toward Jesus, the Light of the World. Are you moving toward the Light, or away from it?