

Unbelief and Wilfull Ignorance

A Gleaning from John 3:18-21

by Matthew Henry

John iii. 18-21, Matthew Henry Commentary, vol. 5, pp 889-890.

Christ, in the close, discourses concerning the deplorable condition of those that persist in unbelief and wilful ignorance, v. 18-21.

(1.) Read here the doom of those that will not believe in Christ: they are condemned already. Observe, [1.] How great the sin of unbelievers is; it is aggravated from the dignity of the person they slight; they believe not in the name of the only begotten Son of God, who is infinitely true and deserves to be believed, infinitely good, and deserves to be embraced. God sent one to save us that was dearest to himself and shall not he be dearest to us? Shall we not believe on his name who has a name above every name? [2.] How great the misery of unbelievers is: they are condemned already: which bespeaks, First, A certain condemnation. They are as sure to be condemned in the judgment of the great day as if they were condemned already. Secondly, A present condemnation. The curse has already taken hold of them; the wrath of God now fastens upon them. They are condemned already, for their own hearts condemn them. Thirdly, A condemnation grounded upon their former guilt. He is condemned already, for he lies open to the law for all his sins; the obligation of the law is in full force, power, and virtue, against him, because he is not by faith interested in the gospel defeasance; he is condemned already, because he has not believed. Unbelief may truly be called the great damning sin, because it leaves us under the guilt of all our other sins; it is a sin against the remedy, against our appeal.

(2.) Read also the doom of those that would not so much as know him, (v. 19). Many inquisitive people had knowledge of Christ and his doctrine and miracles, but they were prejudiced against him, and would not believe in him, while the generality were sottishly careless and stupid, and would not know him. And this is the condemnation, the sin that ruined them, that light is come into the world, and they loved darkness rather. Now here observe, [1.] that the gospel is light and, when the gospel came, light came into the world. Light is self-evidencing, so is the gospel; it proves its own divine origin. Light is discovering, and truly the light is sweet, and rejoices the heart. It is a light shining in a dark place, and a dark place indeed the world would be without it. It is come into all the world (Col. i. 6), and not confined to one corner of it, as the Old Testament light was. [2.] It is the unspeakable folly of the most of men that they loved darkness rather than light, rather than this light. The Jews loved the dark shadows of their law, and the instructions of their blind guides, rather than the doctrine of Christ. The Gentiles loved their superstitious services of an unknown God, whom they ignorantly worshipped, rather than the reasonable service which the gospel enjoins. Sinners that were wedded to their lusts loved their ignorance and mistakes, which supported them in their sins, rather than the

truths of Christ, which would have parted them from their sins. Man's apostasy began in an affectation of forbidden knowledge, but is kept up by an affectation of forbidden ignorance. Wretched man is in love with his sickness, in love with his slavery, and will not be made free, will not be made whole. [3.] The true reason why men love darkness rather than light is because their deeds are evil. They love darkness because they think it is an excuse for their evil deeds, and they hate the light because it robs them of the good opinion they had of themselves, by showing them their sinfulness and misery. Their case is sad and, because they are resolved that they will not mend it, they are resolved that they will not see it. [4.] Wilful ignorance is so far from excusing sin that it will be found, at the great day, to aggravate the condemnation: This is the condemnation, this is what ruins souls, that they shut their eyes against the light, and will not so much as admit a parley with Christ and his gospel; they set God so much at defiance that they desire not the knowledge of his ways, Job xxi. 14. We must account in the judgment, not only for the knowledge we had, and used not, but for the knowledge we might have had, and would not; not only for the knowledge we sinned against, but for the knowledge we sinned away. For the further illustration of this he shows (v. 20, 21) that according as men's hearts and lives are good or bad, so they stand affected to the light Christ has brought into the world.

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