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John 3:18

Speaking of Jesus, John 3:18 says *“Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”* So, there you have it, right? All this stuff about everyone being saved in Christ is not biblical; right there in John it says if you don’t believe then you are condemned.

Hold on a minute! Before we jump to conclusions we need to step back for a moment and think about how we read the bible. The context for reading the bible is the Word of God, the member of the Trinity who became flesh (John 1:14.)

God has spoken to humanity in and through Jesus. So his identity and the reality he reveals are the foundation of our thought about God. Even the bible itself must conform to Jesus! This means that before we read any passage of scripture we need to have fixed in our minds the answer to the question “who is Jesus?”

He is the one in whom all humanity exists (Col. 1:17), in whom all humanity is adopted into the Triune Life (Eph 1:5, 2:15), and in whom all humanity is reconciled to the Father (Col. 1:20).

So, whatever John means when he says “those who do not believe are condemned” he cannot mean that unbelief causes you to be excluded from the life the Son shares with the Father or the reconciliation that he has brought about by giving humanity a new existence in himself (Eph. 2:15.)

John is talking about our perception of ourselves. Our human perspective, apart from hearing the Word of God, is to believe we are condemned by God. If we encounter the Truth about who Jesus is and don’t believe that Truth we will go on experiencing *our own lie*, the lie that we are condemned.

In fact, John makes this clear by what he says just one verse before this in John 3:17, *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

Our feelings of condemnation do not come from the Son! He did not come to condemn us. These feelings come from our own fallen hearts and minds. The Father sent the Son into the world to save the world and the Son has accomplished that mission. The gospel is the good news that he has accomplished his mission.

This news is true whether we believe it or not (John 3:17.) When we believe this news we are freed from feelings of condemnation and guilt (John 3:18.)

~ Jonathan Stepp