

John 15:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin:
but now they have no cloke for their sin.

Analysis

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin (εἰ μὴ ἦλθον καὶ ἐλάλησα αὐτοῖς, ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχον/εἰ mē ēlthon kai elalēsa autois, hamartian ouk eichosan)—this contrary-to-fact condition addresses the sin of rejecting Christ specifically, not sin in general. The phrase **they had not had sin** doesn't mean sinless perfection, but rather they would lack this particular guilt: rejecting God's ultimate self-revelation in His incarnate Son.

Christ's coming and speaking (both ēlthon/came and elalēsa/spoke emphasize the incarnation and ministry) created moral responsibility. Light exposes darkness; revelation demands response. Ignorance before Christ's coming offered relative excuse; rejection after His revelation constitutes culpable sin.

But now they have no cloke for their sin (νῦν δὲ πρόφασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν/nyn de prophasin ouk echousin peri tēs hamartias autōn)—prophasis means excuse, pretext, cover, or cloak. The perfect revelation of God in Christ strips away every excuse for unbelief. Where full light shines, claiming ignorance becomes impossible.

This doesn't minimize pre-Christ sin (Romans 1:18-32 shows all humanity guilty before God), but it identifies supreme sin: rejecting the Father's climactic Word (Hebrews 1:1-2). Greater light brings greater responsibility; complete revelation demands complete accountability.

Historical Context

Jesus spoke these words knowing His three-year ministry—teaching, miracles, fulfillment of prophecy, sinless life—provided overwhelming evidence of His identity. The Jewish leaders had witnessed unprecedented revelation: Moses' law fulfilled, prophets' predictions realized, God's glory manifested. Rejecting such comprehensive testimony constituted willful rebellion, not innocent ignorance.

Within hours, the Sanhedrin would demonstrate this culpability, condemning Jesus despite knowing Scripture pointed to Him. Pilate observed, "What evil hath he done?" (Matthew 27:23), recognizing no legitimate charge. Yet religious and political leaders chose crucifixion over acknowledgment.

The early church faced this reality: Jewish rejection of the Messiah after His resurrection, public miracles by apostles, and Spirit-empowered testimony represented inexcusable unbelief. Paul addresses this in Romans 10:18-21, quoting Moses and Isaiah to show Israel heard but refused. Hebrews 6:4-6 warns that falling away after enlightenment is particularly grievous.

This principle extends through history: those exposed to clear gospel proclamation who reject Christ face greater condemnation than those who never heard (Matthew 11:20-24, Luke 12:47-48).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does exposure to biblical truth increase moral responsibility and potential guilt for rejection?
2. What "cloaks" or excuses do modern people use to justify unbelief despite clear revelation of Christ?
3. How should this verse shape evangelistic urgency and warnings about the consequences of rejecting Christ?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	μὴ	ἦλθον	καὶ	ἐλάλησα	αὐτῶν	ἁμαρτίας	οὐκ
G1487	G3361	I had	and	spoken	unto them	sin	no
		G2064	G2532	G2980	G846	G266	G3756
ἔχουσιν	νῦν	δὲ	πρόφασιν	οὐκ	ἔχουσιν	περὶ	τῆς
had	now	but	cloak	no	had	for	G3588
G2192	G3568	G1161	G4392	G3756	G2192	G4012	
ἁμαρτίας	αὐτῶν						
sin	unto them						
G266	G846						

Additional Cross-References

John 9:41 (Sin): Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

James 4:17 (Sin): Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Acts 17:30 (Parallel theme): And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Romans 1:20 (Parallel theme): For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

John 12:48 (Parallel theme): He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

Romans 2:1 (Parallel theme): Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

Luke 12:46 (Parallel theme): The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

Ezekiel 2:5 (Parallel theme): And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.

1 Peter 2:16 (Sin): As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.