

John 3:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Analysis

This verse provides the essential balance to 3:16, clarifying God's redemptive purpose. The Greek conjunction *gar* (for) indicates that verse 17 explains verse 16's love. God sent His Son not *eis katakrino* (to condemn) but *hina sothe* (that the world might be saved). The verb *sothe* derives from *sozo*, meaning to rescue, heal, deliver, and preserve. The repetition of 'world' (*kosmos*) emphasizes the universal scope of salvation offered. The purpose clause 'that the world through him might be saved' establishes Christ as the exclusive means of salvation - salvation comes *dia autou* (through Him). This verse addresses the misunderstanding that Christ's mission was primarily judicial rather than redemptive. While judgment occurs as response to rejection, salvation remains God's primary intent.

Historical Context

In the context of Jesus' nocturnal dialogue with Nicodemus, this verse addresses Jewish expectations of Messiah as judge who would condemn Gentiles and vindicate Israel. Jesus reframes the mission: salvation precedes judgment as God's priority. The broader context of John's Gospel shows that judgment results from response to light (3:19-21), not from divine desire to condemn. In the early church, this verse countered both Jewish nationalism (which expected judgment on Gentiles) and Greek fatalism (which saw gods as capricious). The emphasis on God's saving intent rather than condemning will became foundational to Christian soteriology. Church Fathers like Athanasius cited this verse against Arian denials of Christ's full divinity, arguing that only God can save the world.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God's saving purpose rather than condemning intent transform our view of evangelism and mission?
2. Why is it significant that judgment results from rejection rather than being God's primary purpose in sending Christ?

Interlinear Text

οὐ	γὰρ	ἀπέστειλεν	ό	θεὸς	τὸν	υἱὸν	αὐτοῦ	εἰς	τὸν
not	For	sent	G3588	God	G3588	Son	him	into	G3588
G3756	G1063	G649		G2316		G5207	G846	G1519	
κόσμος	ἴνα	κρίνῃ	τὸν	κόσμος	ἀλλ᾽	ἴνα	σωθῆ	ό	
the world	that	condemn	G3588	the world	but	that	might be saved		G3588
G2889	G2443	G2919		G2889	G235	G2443	G4982		
κόσμος	δι'	αὐτοῦ							
the world	through	him							
G2889	G1223	G846							

Additional Cross-References

1 John 4:14 (Salvation): And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Luke 19:10 (Salvation): For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

John 6:57 (Parallel theme): As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

John 6:40 (Parallel theme): And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:29 (References God): Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

John 20:21 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

1 John 2:2 (Parallel theme): And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 5:45 (Parallel theme): Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.

John 17:3 (References God): And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

John 11:42 (Parallel theme): And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.