

## John – Lesson 3

### John Chapter 3

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**Introduction:** In the last part of Chapter 2 we saw Jesus drive out the moneychangers from the temple. Jesus had been sent from God to save those who would believe, and Jesus was very much against the way that organized religion had turned the Lord's House into a place of profit.

**Overview of John 3:** The first portion of John 3, Jesus explained the new birth to Nicodemus. He then proceeded to present clearly the gospel. John sets forth one of the clearest most concise summaries of the gospel to be found in the Bible. He concludes this section with piercing insight as to why unsaved men reject and even hate the truth.

#### I. The New Birth

*John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:  
John 3:2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

Several things should be noted about Nicodemus. First, he was a very religious man. Nicodemus was a leader of Israel. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the land. His name is of Greek origin, meaning 'conqueror.' and he was a member of the Pharisees which was a 'party' of Judaism. As a rule, they were the theological conservatives of the day.

Though they were doctrinally orthodox, they were steeped in pride, self-righteousness, and practical legalism. One of the Pharisees, one of the strongest religious groups that were very serious about religion. I think this is highly important, in that this man would seek out our Lord. The average man on the street many times does not have a lot of theological training, so he might believe something that was not of God as truth.

But a man who had much training, one that was a ruler of the Jews, this man saw that Jesus was no ordinary teacher. He calls him "Rabbi", showing respect, and states that "Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Nicodemus was right ... Jesus was far more than a man, He was the Messiah.

Is it not true that sometimes those most trained in religious matters can become entangled in the worst snares. The Pharisees boasted that they were the only

interpreters of the law as if they possessed the marrow and hidden meaning of Scripture. If anyone claims to be the only one who can interpret the Word of the Lord, know that they are not teaching the truth. The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the truth if we but let Him work in our lives.

*2 Pet 1:20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*

*2 Pet 1:21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

It is also important to note that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, probably fearing the reproach of the other religious leaders if they say him talking to Jesus. It has been speculated that he came at night to avoid being recognized by others. That being presumed, he evidently was more concerned with the respect of men than of God. Though it is not noted in John 3, he evidently was born again. *In John 7:50, he is found defending Jesus before the attacks of the high priest and other Pharisees. Moreover, when Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus participated in the burial, along with Joseph of Arimathea, (John 19:39).*

*John 19:39 And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.*

*John 19:40 Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.*

His address of Jesus as *Rabbi* is also significant. It was a term reserved for the formally schooled Jewish teachers, which Jesus from rural Galilee was not. Nicodemus realized Jesus' teaching was accredited by the miracles he had recently witnessed. They validated him as a "teacher come from God. For no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Those that fear to be seen in the light with Christ fear reproach, or they are more concerned with the praise of man. You can always tell preachers who are concerned about the praise of man, they do not preach with Power of the Lord. They are tentative and fear man. We should fear God, not man.

*John 12:42 Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:*

*John 12:43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

*John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

Here Jesus tells one of the elite religious leaders of the day that not only will he not enter into the kingdom of God, he will not even see it if he is not born again. Give

Nicodemus credit, he had dropped the false mask of the Pharisees and came straight to Jesus to find the truth. He hears about something that he has never heard before “Be born again.”

The words “Verily, Verily” are translated from the, at times, non-translated word (amhn) *amen*. The Greek word *amen* derives directly from the Hebrew (Nma) *amen* which means ‘verily,’ ‘truly,’ or ‘so be it.’ When preceding a statement, it has the sense of ‘truly.’ Jesus set forth the exclusivity of the new birth. *“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* John used the term “kingdom of God” only twice in all of his writings. Both are found in John 3:3 and 3:5.

It literally is a reference to the long-promised Jewish Kingdom which the Messiah would restore to Israel. Jesus was talking to a Jewish leader, no doubt, looking for that kingdom. In its broader scope, the kingdom of God is a all-encompassing reference to heaven and the things of God in general. For the gentile church, the kingdom will not be entered until after arriving in heaven and returning with Jesus Christ according to Revelation 19:11 and following.

*Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

*Rev 19:12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

*Rev 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.*

*John 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

*John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

*John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

*John 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

Nicodemus is honest and asks a very sensible question. How can you be born again if you are old? None of us can come to God unless we experience this new birth, and Jesus explains what it takes to be born again. It is not a physical birth, but a spiritual birth. We do not reenter our mother’s womb, but we are born by the Spirit. Note it talks about how that we must be born of water and of the spirit to enter the kingdom of God.

Some religious groups use this to prove baptismal regeneration. But Jesus explains the full meaning of the verse in verse 6. When we are first born, we come forth from our mother’s in sack of water... true? That is the first birth... born of water is the “Flesh is flesh” part of verse 6. Then the second birth is of the Spirit, which is the second half of the verse 6 where it speaks of “That which is born of the Spirit is

spirit.” In simple terms, we must experience two births. The physical into this world, and the spiritual which gains us access to the kingdom of God. (heaven)

Jesus then makes clear the distinction between a first and second birth. The first “is born of the flesh.” The second is “born of the Spirit” of God.

Whether Nicodemus was truly perplexed by Jesus’ answer or just being argumentative is not clear. However, Jesus made his teaching quite clear in verse 5. Again, the double *amen* is used to put emphasis on what Jesus was about to say. There certainly has been controversy over the significance of Jesus’ teaching at this point.

*There are three basic positions which have been advanced over the years. The first is patently wrong, the second is plausible. The third fits the context. Those who would advance the heresy—baptism forms a part of one’s salvation—like to use John 3:5 as proof thereof. However, this error is inconsistent with the rest of Scripture. Moreover, it certainly does not mesh with the immediate following context.*

*In the Bible, without question, salvation is by faith and faith alone. Nowhere in the Scripture is baptism ever a part.*

The second position is consistent with biblical theology. However, there is no support for it in the context. This view takes the position that the water mentioned here is a veiled reference to the written Word of God, which indeed has cleansing properties. *Peter described how we are born again by “incorruptible (seed), by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (I Peter 1:23).*

*In Ephesians 4:26, Paul spoke how God sanctifies and cleanses the church “with the washing of water by the word.” This is all true. There is no support for this idea in the immediate context. Though God’s Word certainly does have cleansing properties (Psalm 119:9-11), throughout the Old Testament era of which Nicodemus was familiar, God’s Word was never thought of as ‘water.’*

*Psa 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Psa 119:12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.*

The third and clearly contextual position is that the water here is a reference to physical birth. *Any parent knows that a baby is born in a sack of water (amniotic fluid) which breaks just prior to delivery. A baby is always born wet.* The immediate following context clearly contrasts physical birth from spiritual birth.

The position of this writer is that the water mentioned here is a reference to physical birth. To that degree, it has nothing to do with being born again. The crucial element of being born again is being born “of the Spirit.” When a person is saved, he has a new spiritual nature born within by the Holy Ghost. It is being born of God spiritually as John mentions on five occasions in his first epistle. Whereas childbirth is being

born of the flesh, being born again is being born of God. It is being born from above. It is being begotten again by God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3)

*1 Pet 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

*John 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

*John 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*

The imperative of the new birth is made clear. “Ye must be born again.” In saying, “Marvel not,” Jesus in effect said, ‘You shouldn’t be amazed by this.’

Jesus proceeded to use an everyday illustration. Wind is a common phenomena. We are aware of it. We hear it. We see the results thereof. But we do not actually see it. It, though powerful, is invisible. Moreover, we really don’t know from where it comes nor to where it is going. The clear implication of our Lord is first of the Spirit of God. He also is powerful but invisible. Nevertheless, we are aware of His working in us. However and secondly, the context clearly is how the Holy Spirit is like the invisible wind. He is the Divine Agent of the new birth.

When a man or woman is saved, we don’t understand where it comes from, just like we can’t see the wind... but we feel the wind don’t we? Same way when the Holy Spirit comes into us and abides with us, He bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God.

*Rom 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*

Nicodemus is a bit confused, and asks “How can these things be?” The lost man can not truly comprehend the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. But he illuminates our eyes when we come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

*1 Cor 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

To anyone having experienced the new birth, its effect is obvious. However, like the wind, we never see the actual working of the Holy Spirit. The greater truth Jesus taught is that the new birth is spiritual .It is not sensational in the sense our physical senses are stimulated. But it is very real nevertheless. It is like the wind. We can’t see it, but it is genuine nonetheless.

*John 3:10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?*

*John 3:11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.*

*John 3:12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

Jesus is very candid with Nicodemus about the importance of the new birth. He says "You are a master of Israel" and don't know these things? Jesus then makes it clear that unless he could understand worldly things, how could he possibly believe heavenly things. We are faced with the same dilemma in life. We must come to God by faith. We will never totally understand about salvation while we are here on earth, but we must trust God and believe Him.

*Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Nicodemus still didn't get it. Jesus therefore queried him, 'art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?' Jesus continued gently reproving him. He in effect said, 'We talk about what we understand and testify of what we see. But you are not receiving our witness.' It is clear here that the new birth is not an attainment. It is not through education or training.

The word translated as earthly (*epigeiov epigeios*) refers to 'terrestrial.' In the context here it essentially is a reference to physical things. Jesus in effect said to Nicodemus, 'If I have told you about physical things and you will not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things.' Again the contrast of earthly versus heavenly and physical versus spiritual is highlighted. This lends credence to the position that the water mentioned in verse 5 is speaking of physical birth.

Jesus essentially told Nicodemus, you ought to understand the difference between the physical and the spiritual. You are a ruler and teacher of Israel. Jesus will further describe the spiritual implications of the new birth in the coming text.

*John 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*

Jesus tells Nicodemus that no man has ascended up to heaven... only Jesus has come down from heaven to be on earth with man. Christ is exhorting Nicodemus to not trust himself and his own wisdom because no mortal had ever entered into heaven.

As Jesus had mentioned heavenly things in the preceding verse, He let Nicodemus know why He knew what He was talking about. He had been *in* heaven. The reference to ascending up into heaven has nothing to do with Christ's later

ascension. Jesus was simply pointing out that man humanly cannot ascend to heaven. (The exceptions to that of course were Enoch and Elijah who did so by Divine dispensation.) The thrust of the thought is that Jesus knew what He was talking about because He had been in heaven.

The final phrase, “even the Son of man which is in heaven” is of interest. What is implied is the omnipresence of our Lord. For even as He spoke to Nicodemus on the earth, He was at once and the same time in heaven. Only the omnipresent God could so do. The Deity of Christ again comes into view. No man has the right or access to heaven except Jesus Christ.

*1 Cor 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

*1 Cor 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

Man many times wants to think that he has a mind that can think like God. But we are not even on a plane to consider how high God’s thoughts truly are.

*1 Cor 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

*1 Cor 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.*

*1 Cor 3:20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.*

*Isa 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

*Isa 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

*John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:*

*John 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

Jesus gives an account from Old Testament history, known to Nicodemus, to illustrate the greatest work in history not far distant. In Numbers 21:7 and following is the account of the incident of the brazen serpent during the exodus.

Jesus makes it clear it was an anti-type of His coming work on the cross.

Accordingly, He said, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” The parallels between the serpent and the cross are obvious. In each case, as penitent sinners, suffering from the sting of sin, would look in simple faith to the one sacrificed and lifted up; God would deliver and save them. In each case in John, the word translated as lifted up (‘uqow *hupsou*) refers to

Christ on the cross (8:28, 12:32,34).

As sinners in simple faith will turn to Him who is lifted up, trusting Him and Him alone, they will not perish, but have eternal life. The word translated as perish (*apollumi appolumi*) is the same base word which on other occasions is translated as 'lost' as in Luke 19:10.

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

Those who are lost will perish and those saved will go on to be with the Lord. The verb in the final phrase (*ecw echo*), but have eternal life, is present, active, subjunctive which literally means 'always have eternal life.'

John uses the phrase "eternal life" sixteen times in his gospel and six times in his first epistle. It has the sense of ageless or endless life, beginning now, and continuing on forever. It is more than endless in quantity. It is entering into and sharing with the life of God through Christ in its character. The New Birth is given to men as a gift through the cross of Christ.

*The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus evidently here is finished. The verb tenses change from what Jesus was using in his conversation with Nicodemus. The setting passes from ongoing conversation to completed action.*

Jesus tells Nicodemus that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, and everyone that looked upon that serpent, did not die of the snake bites, so will it be with those that come to Jesus. And Jesus was lifted up on the cross, and he paid for our sins on Calvary. And when you and I lift Him up today, he will draw all men to Him and save as many as will believe.

*John 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

In John Calvin's commentary on John, he wrote: "To be **lifted up** means to be placed in an elevated position so that everyone can see you. This was done by the preaching of the Gospel. The explanation of this which some people put forward, that it refers to the cross, does not fit the context or match his present argument. So the straightforward meaning of the words is that by the preaching of the Gospel Christ was raised up like a standard so that everybody's eyes would be directed to him, just as Isaiah had predicted in chapter 2, verse 2. As a type of this lifting up he refers to the snake which was erected by Moses. People who had been harmed by the fatal bite of snakes were healed when they looked on the elevated bronze serpent. (Numbers 21) Christ introduces this here to show that he has to be viewed by everyone through the teaching of the Gospel, so that everyone who looks at him with faith may receive salvation."

## II. John Recapitulates and Summarizes what Jesus taught Nicodemus.

*John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

What a great great verse. Perhaps one of the first you ever memorized as a child. As the song we sometimes sing “Oh for the Love of the One up above, oh for the Love of God” When we stop and see the great grace, the unmerited love of God for us, what a blessing to have such a great Heavenly Father that withholds no blessings for his children.

There is no one on God’s earth that can not be the richest person in the world if we but know Jesus as Savior. And then there are those with many worldly riches that are but paupers in God’s sight. What a blessing, what a joy to have Jesus as Lord and Savior.

John is inspired by the Holy Spirit as he reflected upon the sum of Christ’s ministry many years later. This is implied in the introductory word *for*. Moreover, it summarizes the essence of the gospel preached throughout His entire ministry.

The verb tenses change from the present tense in the preceding to the past tense which denotes completed action. John is now looking back at the completed work of Christ. The word translated as loved (*agapaw agapao*—the verb form of *agapē*) essentially means a giving of one’s self for another. It is selfless in its nature and focuses upon the need of the other. Indeed, God did precisely that in sending Jesus. The object of God’s love is the world.

The word so translated (*kosmov kosmos*) bespeaks the total sum of humanity. His love to mankind is not limited to an elect few. Accordingly, “he gave.” The reality of agape-love is a willingness to give for the needs of another. Gods gave of Himself precisely what was needed— His Son. John again refers to Jesus as the “only begotten Son.” Again, this is reference to His incarnation. As in verse 15, the key to eternal life is believing. It speaks of relying exclusively upon Jesus Christ. It is total dependence on Him.

It implies there is no other way. There are lessor degrees of faith such as the intellectual ‘head-knowledge’ type of faith. Though better than no faith, it is not sufficient to save. There also is a temporal-type of faith in seeking God’s help for a present crisis. Though this is still a higher level of faith, it likewise is not sufficient to save. What is implied in the principle of saving faith as defined here, is a turning to and believing in Jesus Christ as one’s only hope of salvation.

*Remember: God does the bearing, (John 1:13). God does the giving, (John 3:16). Christ does the travailing, (John 3:14, Isa. 53:11). We are begotten by Gods Word, (1 Cor. 14:15). We are born of the Spirit, (John 3:6).*

### III. Salvation is From God

*John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

*John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Note that the Lord was not sent to condemn the world, but to save it. Many don't acknowledge their lost and undone condition before God today. They don't take their position as a lost and condemned sinner in need of a savior. But verse 18 explains that all that have sinned are condemned already, because they have not believed on the name of Jesus. Jesus is the one we need to look to, Him and Him alone.

*John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*

*John 11:26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*

*John Gill said this about verse 17.*

**For God sent not his Son into the world,....** God did send his Son into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh, being made of a woman, and made under the law; and which is an instance of his great love, and not of any disrespect to his Son, or of any inequality between them: but then this was not

**to condemn the world;** even any part of it, or any in it: not the Gentiles, as the Jews thought he would; for though God had suffered them to walk in their own ways, and had winked at, or overlooked the times of their ignorance, and had sent no prophet unto them, nor made any revelation of his will, or any discovery of his special grace unto them; yet he sent his Son now, not to destroy them for their idolatry, and wickedness, but to be the Saviour of them: nor the Jews; for as impenitent and unbelieving, and as wicked as they were, he did not accuse them to the Father, nor judge and condemn them; he was to come again in power and great glory, when he would take vengeance on them, and cause wrath to come upon them to the uttermost, for their disbelief and rejection of him; but this was not his business now: nor the wicked of the world in general; to judge, and condemn them, will be his work, when he comes a second time, in the day God has appointed to judge the world in righteousness.

John gives further explanation of God's sending of Jesus into the world. Though God ultimately has given all judgement to the Son (John 5:22), that was not His purpose in coming. Rather, Jesus Christ came "that the world through him might be saved."

John uses the word *saved* here for the first time. It is translated from the word (swzw) *sodzo* and is used over one- hundred times in the New Testament. It is related to the noun form (swthria *soteria*) which is usually translated as 'salvation.' It was commonly used for physical healing or deliverance. Here it clearly speaks of spiritual salvation. It is being saved from sin.

The purpose of Christ's coming is that men might be saved. To believe Him is to escape condemnation and have life. To reject Him is to go on in an already present condemnation. The verb tenses of the participles in this verse are instructive. "He that believeth on him is not condemned."

In the former verb (a participle in the Greek) the tense is *present* which implies ongoing action. Thus, as we believe (i.e., totally trust Him as described above), there is no condemnation even now. For one who "believeth not" (*present* tense), he is "condemned already" (*perfect* tense, passive voice). Such an unbeliever has *already* been condemned. The word translated as already (hdh *ede*) is more commonly translated as 'now.' An unbeliever is condemned even *now*.

Unsaved people are not only unsaved, they are, even as we speak, under the condemnation of God. They need do nothing else. They are *already* condemned. The reason is as simple as it is profound. It is "because they have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

The one sin which condemns is failure to turn to and trust in the *name* (Jesus Christ) of God's only begotten (incarnated) Son. Though sin in general has already condemned humanity, the final nail in one's coffin spiritually is failure to receive Christ by turning to and trusting Him.

#### **IV. Explanation of the Condemnation**

*John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

*John 3:20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.*

All through the Bible, we see the light typifying good while the darkness typifies evil. Jesus was the epitome of the Light, he was the true light that came down from heaven.

You remember perhaps when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for the first time, and a very good and devout man named Simeon was there. He recognized Jesus as the light of the world.

*Luke 2:25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was*

*Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.*

*Luke 2:26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*

*Luke 2:27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,*

*Luke 2:28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,*

*Luke 2:29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:*

*Luke 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,*

*Luke 2:31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;*

*Luke 2:32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

*Luke 2:33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.*

It is important to note that man in his sinful nature does not want to come to God, but rather loves his evil ways and hides from the light. The day that the world rejected Christ and crucified Him on that tree was the day that there was no doubt that man must be judged of God. God out of love, sent His only begotten son to pay our sin debt, and the people of that day rejected Him. And if He was here this morning, most likely the vast majority of the people would have nothing to do with Him. As they sometimes said in their actions in Jesus' day. Luke 19:14

But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." Jesus said that all that do evil hate the light, and will not come to it. Sometimes when we are on visitation, we see people actually turn and try to hide rather than talk with us about the Lord. Why is that? Because the sinful nature of man does not want to come to God. If you are saved, it is due to the Holy Spirit seeking you, and convicting your heart of your sins, and by faith in Christ, today you have a new nature. This is that second birth that Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to give insight into the depth of human depravity and its deserved condemnation. *Any man's condemnation is altogether his or her own fault.*

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. He is repeatedly so referred to by John. Light is the exact opposite of darkness. In physics, darkness is the absence of light. Throughout the Scripture, darkness is a metaphor of evil.

As God's light has entered into the world, men apprehended it not (John 1:5). They want nothing to do with the light. In fact, sinful humanity loves "darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." In verse 19 the word translated as evil (*ponhrov ponerous*) is the generic word for 'evil' or 'wicked' in the New Testament. It is a reference to sin in general. This word evil in verse 20 speaks of abominable actions. Sin nature turns one's heart from God. Hence, those living in sin by are not attracted

by the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. Rather they hate it and actively oppose it. Their wickedness is in danger of being rebuked.

*John 3:21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

In contrast, those doing the truth are attracted to the light of God rather than being repelled by it. The roach lurking in the sewer flees from light whereas the lofty butterfly is attracted to it. The word translated as truth (alhyeia *aletheia*) is the word commonly used for truth. However, in this context it may also mean a broader sense of righteousness and godliness. Those whose works are in truth, righteousness, and godliness are attracted to the light of Jesus Christ and the things of God. They, in contrast, come to the light that their activities might be made manifest. The reason is they are accomplished in God.

Sin avoids and even hates the light of Jesus Christ. In contrast, righteousness, truth, and godliness are attracted to God's light, desiring to find further guidance and encouragement.

When will we do things of truth? Only after our nature has been changed. And even then, we have to battle this old sinful body. But our hearts are determined to serve God, and we are deeply convicted of our sins when we do wrong. And when our hearts are right with the Lord, we will bring those sins to the Lord, confess them, and have them forgiven so that we might restore our fellowship with God.

Jesus told several of those Pharisees, those who felt self-righteous and did not recognize their true sinful condition, that *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5:32) This verse ended the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus.

Albert Barnes in his commentary said this about verse 21.

**Are that doeth truth** - He who does right, or he that obeys the truth. Truth here is opposed to error and to evil. The sinner acts from falsehood and error. The good man acts according to truth. The sinner believes a lie - that God will not punish, or that there is no God, or that there is no eternity and no hell. The Christian believes all these, and acts as if they were true. This is the difference between a Christian and a sinner.

**Cometh to the light** - Loves the truth, and seeks it more and more. By prayer and searching the Scriptures he endeavors to ascertain the truth, and yield his mind to it.

**May be made manifest** - May be made clear or plain; or that it may be made plain that his deeds are performed in God. He searches for truth and light that he may have evidence that his actions are right.

**Wrought in God** - That they are performed according to the will of God, or perhaps by the assistance of God, and are such as God will approve. The actions of

good people are performed by the influence and aid of God, [Phi 2:12](#). Of course, if they are performed by his aid, they are such as he will approve. Here is presented the character of a good man and a sincere Christian. We learn respecting that character:

1. He does truth. He loves it, seeks it, follows it.
2. He comes to the light. He does not attempt to deceive himself or others.
3. He is willing to know himself, and aims to do it. He desires to know the true state of his heart before God.
4. A special object of his efforts is that his deeds may be "wrought in God." He desires to be a good man; to receive continual aid from God, and to perform such actions as he will approve.

## V. The Testimony of John the Baptist

*John 3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.*

*John 3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.*

*John 3:24 For John was not yet cast into prison.*

Jesus takes his disciples into the land of Judea near the town of Aenon. Aenon was in the territory of the tribe of Manasseh. It says there was much water there, due to the convergence of the river Jordan and the brook Jabbok. We see that at this time, prior to John being imprisoned, he was still able to preach "the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2) It was not until after the Lord was tempted of Satan in the wilderness that John was imprisoned. That is not made clear in this account, but you can tell that from the other accounts as we find here in Matthew.

*Mat 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

*Mat 4:2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.*

*Mat 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. ....*

*Mat 4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

*Mat 4:11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

*Mat 4:12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;*

For the first time in the new Testament, record is made of people being baptized unto Jesus. John 4:2 makes it clear that Jesus Himself did not baptize, rather His disciples. Nevertheless, here is the first record of Christian baptism.

A key concept in understanding the principle of baptism is that of identification. Those who received John's message in part were identifying (and hence receiving) his message which was Christ. Those who were baptized by Jesus' disciples were willing to identify with Him, publicly testifying they had received Him as Savior. Meanwhile, John the Baptist was also baptizing nearby at a place called Aenon near the town of Salim.

This probably was a place near the west bank of the Jordan River near Scythopolis. There remains to this day a village named 'Salem' in this vicinity. It is significant that John made a point to baptize here "because there was much water there."

The word translated as baptizing (baptizw *baptidzo*) is transliterated and not translated. It literally means to 'immerse,' 'plunge,' or 'dip.' That is indisputable. The idea of sprinkling or pouring is completely alien to the historic etymology of the word. Moreover, John made a point to baptize at a place where there was *much* water. The circumstantial evidence clearly points to immersion. John had not as yet been arrested by Herod and jailed.

## **VI. Questions on Purifying**

*John 3:25 Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.*

*John 3:26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.*

*John 3:27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.*

We see some of John's disciples come and question about the Lord. They see another group besides themselves baptizing, and this bothers them. We must guard against thinking that we are the only ones that God is using. The ones they question are actually with Jesus Christ.

Ignorance can make a person bold and presumptuous. If that is true, we must all guard against ignorance by constant study in the word of the Lord. John tells them that unless God does the blessing, no one could truly be saved. It is Jesus, and Jesus alone that saves us. Not our works, not our church affiliation, not any other ordinance or tradition.

There arose a question between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. There was evidently friction between the disciples of Jesus and those of John the Baptist. The mention of *purifying* here may be a reference in context to the respective baptisms being done by John and Jesus. Both the preceding and succeeding context deals seamlessly about the matter of baptisms. Baptist baptism never conveys the idea of cleansing or purification (from sin), to the Jewish mind, ritual baths could and often did mean purifying.

This was particularly true in a symbolic or ceremonial sense. Therefore, the debate between John's disciples and those of Jesus may have been over whose baptism was right. The delegation of John's disciples returned to him, complaining that Jesus had bigger crowds and more baptisms than him. Their jealousy is evident in that they would not even mention the name of Jesus. Their spiritual immaturity was reflected in their jealousy of a ministry larger than theirs.

In Verse 27, John, to the contrary, reflected spiritual maturity. "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." In other words, John said, whatever success Jesus was receiving was from heaven. And indeed, it is God's blessing which advances the ministry. That being the case, there is no room for jealousy or petty rivalry.

*John 3:28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.*

*John 3:29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.*

A person who is about to marry does not call and invite his friends to the marriage so that they can make his wife a prostitute or, through giving up his own rights, allow them to share the bridal bed. Rather, the bridegroom invites his friends to the marriage so that it is honored by them and made more sacred.

In the same way, Christ does not call his ministers to the teaching office so that by conquering the church they dominate it, but rather that Christ may use their faithful labors and unite them to himself. If it is important and splendid distinction that people are appointed to positions in the church where they can represent the person of the Son of God. So they are like the friends whom the "bridegroom" brings with him so that they can be made with him in celebrating the marriage. "

John Gill in his commentary said this about verse 29.

**He that is the bridegroom;** and such is Christ; see [Mat 9:15](#); and he acts, and behaves, as such; he loves the saints, as a bridegroom loves his bride, with a love prior to theirs; with a love of complacency and delight, which is single, chaste, and inviolable; free, and sovereign, wonderful, unchangeable, and from everlasting to everlasting; he sympathises with them in all their adversities, and afflictions; he nourishes, and cherishes them, and provides everything for them, for food, and clothing, for refreshment and protection; and interests them in all he has: and an amazing instance of grace this is, that such who are no better than others, children of wrath by nature; exceeding great sinners, guilty, and filthy; bankrupts, and beggars on the dunghill; and yet are taken into so near a relation to him; who is in the form of God, and equal to him, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, the Son of God, in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells;

the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

John had earlier told his disciples that there was one coming after him that he was not even qualified to tie his shoes. And how important was John? Jesus said that there was no greater born of woman than John the Baptist.

*Luke 7:28 For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*

*Luke 3:15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;*

*Luke 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:*

When we serve the Lord, we worry not about pleasing man. But if our goal is to please man, we will make many mistakes. Here they question the matter of ceremonial washing, as the law laid down for the Jews as to how baptisms and washings should be carried out.

They were really more concerned it seems of the outward appearance and maintaining John the Baptist as the baptizer than to really understanding doctrine. And while we can go to seed on doctrine, we had sure better know it or we will make many errors. John makes them understand that the one they question is the bridegroom himself.

Perhaps these disciples of John felt that Christ should be inferior to John, when in reality it was Christ himself that gave reason for John to come as that witness and “voice crying in the wilderness.” Nothing could be more absurd than to try and make Christ inferior to John, as John’s witness to Jesus was so strong. In verse 26, they made claim that “all men go to him” as if it was wrong that they were not coming to John.

God help all of us to know that we are together in the work of the Lord, whether we preach here in Texas, or someone preaches the Gospel in Russia. We are all laborers for the Lord, and we should rejoice that others also are in the battle for the Lord.

John reminded his jealous followers that he had told them, “I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.” That is to say, Jesus is the Christ. John was just His forerunner. John used an illustration which is weighty with greater truth.

A bride has her bridegroom. However, it was the duty of the friend of the bridegroom to bring him and the bride together. The idea, at the least, is of a matchmaker. It possibly may have the sense of the friend rejoicing as he hears the bridegroom

speaking romantically to his bride. John was that friend. His ministry, in part, was to bring people to Christ. The Apostle Paul more fully develops the relationship of the espoused church to Jesus Christ, the great Bridegroom in Ephesians 5:23-32 and II Corinthians 11:2. And John wrote more of it Revelation 19:6-7 and 21:2.

*Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*

*Eph 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.*

*Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

*Eph 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,*

*Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

*Eph 5:28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.*

*Eph 5:29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:*

*Eph 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*

*Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.*

*Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

Here, John the Baptist rejoiced in introducing the future bride to the Bridegroom. In the greater scope of eschatology, a definite clue is given as to who the friend of the bride and groom will be. John the Baptist, as a quintessential Jew, may indeed be representative here of Israel. Someday at the marriage supper of the Lamb, believing Israel will be the friends and guests present. This further implies the distinction between Israel and the church. Though there is a spiritual relationship and similarity between the two, they are not the same.

## **VII. John's Desire to Serve The Lord**

*John 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease.*

*John 3:31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.*

As the ministry of Jesus Christ increased, John's of necessity decreased. As his divinely appointed role as forerunner was accomplished, he would fade into the background. That is exactly what happened. From here to the end of the chapter, the Apostle John makes final comment upon John the Baptist's ministry and Jesus' impending ministry. He properly noted that Jesus was from heaven, while John the Baptist was quite earthly. He that came from above is literally over all and above all,

including John the Baptist.

The reference to “he that is of the earth” is the contrast of John’s mere human origins. The simple point the Apostle John is driving at is that Jesus, from heaven, is superior to and over John the Baptist, who was from the earth and spoke from there.

Perhaps one of the most concise statements John ever uttered that we should all remember came in Verse 30. He must increase, but I must decrease. Look at any man or woman who has done much for the Lord, and you will see a humble individual not looking for self gratification, but a soul yearning to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. If God wants us to be a humble caretaker of the church, or the greatest evangelist of the world, it will behoove all of us to follow the example of John.

Let God use you, and you will accomplish more with your talent than you could ever do on your own. As John so eloquently stated, Jesus is the one that came from above, and is above all. John saw himself as just a sinful mortal down here in his pilgrimage. But at the name of Jesus, the Bible says every knee will bow and every tongue profess that Jesus is Lord of All.

*Phil 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

*Phil 2:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

*Phil 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

*Phil 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

*Phil 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:*

*Phil 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;*

*Phil 2:11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

One final comment on he must increase.

J. Vernon McGee said it is very important that we realize where things are accomplished in this life. “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” Again and again this truth will come out. Jesus said, “No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.” (John 6:65) It is important to think about how John’s ministry was almost over at this time.

### **VIII. Guarantee of Salvation through Christ**

*John 3:32 And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.*

*John 3:33 He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.*

*John 3:34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*

*John 3:35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.*

*John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

John the Baptist testified of Jesus Christ concerning what he heard and saw. The phrase of “no man receiveth his testimony is likely referring to what took place just prior to and immediately after the baptism of Jesus. Some did receive his testimony of Christ. The phrase, “hath set to his seal,” relates to a largely bygone practice of the use of seals.

In ancient times, a seal usually was placing hot wax upon a document and then placing a signet ring into the still plastic wax, leaving the ‘signature’ of the ring. It essentially was a mark of ownership.

In the case of official governmental matters and the Roman seal, it conveyed the power and authority of the government. It also could have the sense of a stamp or mark of approval. That is the sense here. Those who received John’s testimony of Jesus had placed their stamp of approval upon God’s truth concerning Him. They had placed their seal as truth upon the testimony that Jesus was the Messiah.

What John said in verse 32 is so true. Jesus had brought and taught exactly what had been given him from the heavenly Father. John is simply stating that all things Jesus taught were things he was fully accredited to teach. What he had heard was from God himself.

And there was never a greater love nor shall there ever be than the love of God to the Son. What a great, great promise in verse 36. All that believe on the Son hath everlasting life. I want you to notice this is present tense. And for anyone doubting that we have security in salvation, ask what does the word “everlasting” or “eternal” mean? It means forever.

God is faithful to us, even if we are not faithful to Him. What instance in the Bible did Jesus ever do something halfway? Were blind people healed in one eye? No. Were lepers half cleansed of their leprosy? Did lame people healed still limp or need a cane? In every instance, the answer is a resounding “NO!” Jesus, who is the author of our salvation, is also the one who will keep us.

*Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

You and I can believe as the apostle Paul. He had confidence in Jesus and passed this on to the young pastor Timothy.

*2 Tim 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

In verse 36, the urgency and conciseness of the gospel are summarized here.

*“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”*

The verb tenses are both present indicative. The thought is, ‘he that is believing on the Son presently has everlasting life.’ It is both now and eternal. As we trust Jesus Christ as Savior, we come into possession of a spiritual gift which will last forever. The tense is not future. It is present. As we trust Christ, we presently *now* have the life which continues forever. If it can be lost, it is not eternal. Yet, it is present tense meaning we *now* possess that life which is eternal.

However, “he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” The word translated as believeth not here (*apeiyew apeitheo*) has nuances not obvious in its English translation. The word is also translated as ‘disobedience.’ It has the sense of a refusal to believe or a refusal to comply.

It clearly implies a willful rejection, in this case, of Jesus Christ the Son. Such an one therefore “shall not see life.” The context is of eternal life. As one refuses to turn to and trust in the resurrected Son of God as Savior, the Word of God is clear. He *will not* see eternal life. The implications of that are sobering.

In fact, “the wrath of God abideth on him.” The righteous indignation of the Almighty God hangs over one who willfully refuses to turn to His Son, who in love and grace has shed His life’s blood for him. Moreover, that wrath is impending even now. The verb tense of the word translated as abideth (*menw meno*) is again present voice, indicative mood. What that implies is present and ongoing action. Therefore, for those who will not turn to Christ, God’s righteous wrath is already operative. It is already impending.

The word *abideth* has the literal sense of remaining, dwelling, or continuing. Unsaved people usually do not realize how precarious their situation is. They are literally a heartbeat away from the righteous wrath of the Almighty God. It is already above them as a great thundercloud. They need do anything else. They already are under the wrath of God. They are already lost. They are already on their way to hell to await judgment and be cast into the Lake of Fire.

*Let us be reminded that what we do in believing and receiving is action based on what he has done: dying , enlightening, inviting.*

*Matthew Henry said this about the promises of verse 36.*

*He is the object of that faith which is made the great condition of eternal*

happiness, and herein he has the pre-eminence above all others: *He that believeth on the Son, hath life, Joh 3:36*. We have here the application of what he had said concerning Christ and his doctrine; and it is the *conclusion of the whole matter*. If God has put this honour upon the Son, we must by faith give honour to him. As God offers and conveys good things to us by the *testimony* of Jesus Christ, whose word is the vehicle of divine favours, so we receive and partake of those favours by *believing* the testimony, and entertaining that word as *true* and *good*; this way of *receiving* fitly answers that way of *giving*. We have here the sum of that gospel which is to be preached to every creature, *Mar 16:16*. Here is,

The blessed state of all true Christians: *He that believes on the Son hath everlasting life*. Note, 1. It is the character of every true Christian that he believes on *the Son of God*; not only *believes him*, that what he saith is true, but believes *on him*, consents to him, and confides in him. The benefit of true Christianity is no less than *everlasting life*; this is what Christ came to purchase for us and confer upon us; it can be no less than the happiness of an immortal soul *in* an immortal God. 2. True believers, even now, *have* everlasting life; not only they shall have it hereafter, but they have it now. For, (1.) They *have* very good security for it. The deed by which it passeth is sealed and delivered to them, and so they *have* it; it is put into the hands of their guardian for them, and so they have it, though the use be not yet transferred into possession. They have the Son of God, and in him *they have life*; and the Spirit of God, the earnest of this life. (2.) They have the comfortable *foretastes* of it, in present communion with God and the tokens of his love. Grace is glory begun.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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