

Jesus had just left the crowds, and now begins a series of individual encounters. The next several segments revolve around Jesus and one other person. John chose these to highlight the character and main message of Jesus. These were people who came to Jesus with misunderstandings of who He is. But their meetings with Him changed their views, and their lives. And they should change ours.

¹ *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ² *This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*

- **Who was Nicodemus?** He was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin (*body of 70 elders, both Sadducees and Pharisees, controlled matters in Jerusalem, moral authority, spiritual and social leadership*), a senator, a counselor, a man of authority in Jerusalem, and a Pharisee. Bad as things were, there were some rulers seeking the truth. We also know he was wealthy. When Jesus died, Nicodemus brought spices for his burial. (see John 19:39)
- **ABOUT THE PHARISEES:** The Pharisees were legalists and separatists who strictly, but most often hypocritically, kept the law of Moses and the unwritten "tradition of the elders." They were an exclusive bunch, and never allowed more than 6,000 at one time. The Pharisees considered themselves a "brotherhood" and took a pledge in front of three witnesses that they would spend their entire lives observing every detail of the law. In this way, many believed they did not need atonement if they kept the letter of the Law. They could "earn" their way to heaven. To the Jew, the Law was the most sacred thing in all the world. The Law was the perfect Word of God, and they believed it contained everything you needed to live rightly before God. Nothing else was required. They spent their lifetimes reading and building on the Law and attempting to keep it perfectly. The Jewish MISHNAH is the codified law – rabbinical interpretation of Law. All other scriptures were secondary to them.
- **COMMENTARY:** *The principles of the Pharisees, and the peculiarities of their sect, were directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity; yet there were some in whom even those high thoughts were cast down and brought into obedience to Christ. The grace of Christ is able to subdue the greatest opposition.*
- **Why did he come by night?** Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid to come by day, or he may have wanted a long talk, which would have been difficult in the daytime with the crowds around Jesus. He may have been fearful of appearing during the day in public before the rest of his peers. He was no doubt aware of the talk about Jesus among his fellow Pharisees and rulers of Jerusalem, and the opposition His ministry was stirring up. He was probably also concerned about his own reputation.



- ***“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*** Nicodemus did not come to talk with Jesus about politics (though he was a ruler). He came because by His own signs Jesus was recognized even by some Pharisees. He acknowledges that Jesus is a “teacher from God” because no one could do the things Jesus was doing without God. Nicodemus calls Jesus “Rabbi,” which signifies a great man. Nicodemus has respect for this man, but he isn’t quite sure who He is, really. The Holy Spirit is probably stirring up Nicodemus’ soul. There is something more about this man Jesus, and he wants to find out exactly who He is. Nicodemus is there at the yearning and questioning of his own soul.
- **“We know”** indicates that other Pharisees and influential religious leaders were convinced that Jesus was a **teacher come from God** because of the miracles. IT WAS EVIDENT, EVEN TO THEM. Jesus had some credibility even to some Pharisees, but Nicodemus obviously is still ignorant of His real identity.

³ ***Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”***

- Jesus doesn’t waste any time here on pleasantries. He immediately got right to the critical question of the eternal destiny of everyone. Jesus knew what was on Nicodemus’ mind, and what was in his heart. This could be seen as a rebuke to Nicodemus’ address to Jesus as a “teacher” sent from God. He is that, but far more. **It wasn’t good enough to see His miracles and acknowledge His mission. Everyone must be “born again.”** It isn’t even enough to admit and acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. We have to change first, in a way that only the Spirit can perform. Salvation requires a rebirth, a birth of the spirit, not the body.
- Jesus introduces a concept here that is reiterated throughout the New Testament. It is the idea of **rebirth, regeneration**. Although not wholly a new idea (present in the Old Testament) it no doubt startled Nicodemus, the Law-abiding Pharisee, but Jesus will soon explain this.
- Many pagan religions were somewhat familiar with this concept. Anyone converting to a faith (pagan faith) was subjected to various rituals which were designed to make him “reborn.” The enemy counterfeits and corrupts the beauty of God’s plan.
- **“Born again Christian”** is a commonly used phrase, often in context of distinguishing between Christians who are “born again” and those who are not. However, it is really an incorrect distinction, for all true Christians have been “born again.” (Separates those who merely wear a label of “Christian” from those who believe and are obedient to Jesus). The Bible uses the expression “born again” only a few times...Jesus in His conversation here with Nicodemus and Peter in his first epistle - 1 Peter 1:3,23 (Although the idea of being “born” of God is used many times)
- ***“...the kingdom of God.”*** This is the only place in John where this term is used (twice in this chapter). **What is the kingdom of God?** In brief...The rule and reign of God in the person of Christ (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36; Revelation 1:4). It is a spiritual kingdom not of this world (John 18:36; Luke 17:20-21). This kingdom is made up of faithful subjects (i.e., the church) (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:6,9). It is a kingdom both present and future (Matthew 13:41-43; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26). This term is used 5X in Matthew, 15X in Mark, 31X in Luke, 7X in Acts, and 8X by Paul in his letters.

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- Nicodemus was **confused**, assuming that Jesus referred to a physical birth. Someone like Nicodemus valued his first (physical) birth a great deal, because he believed it afforded him privileges with God. Being born a Jew, into certain tribes, the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, parentage, etc, are all things very important to Jews. Paul gloried in these things to make a point – a point that none of it mattered! So it is a great surprise to Nicodemus to hear he must be born again. Didn’t his physical birth offer him a place in the kingdom of the Messiah? He didn’t understand what Jesus was saying, but he acknowledged his ignorance. He asks, and seeks the answer.
- “...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ...” Jesus explained the **nature of this new birth**. It involves both water and the Spirit. It is a washing of regeneration (water) and a renewing of the Holy Spirit (Spirit) Paul explains it to Titus this way: “*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*” (Titus 3:3-7)



Water is a symbol for cleansing, purification. The Word of God is seen as this same cleansing agent:

“...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word...” (Ephesians 5:25-26)

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...” (1 Peter 1:22-23).

The laver in the Tabernacle is a symbol for the **washing power of God's Word**. The regenerating work of the Spirit is compared to water. To be born again is to be born of water and of the Spirit, that is, of the Spirit working like water, cleansing and purifying like water, taking away filth, which makes us unfit for the kingdom of God. It is the washing of regeneration.

Water also refers to baptism-- regeneration by the Spirit is signified by washing with water, as the visible sign of immersion into God. THIS WAS NOT INTENDED TO IMPLY THAT BAPTISM IS NECESSARY TO SALVATION. The Jews cannot partake of the benefits of the Messiah’s kingdom they have so long looked for, unless they quit all expectations of being justified by the works of the Law, and submit to the baptism of repentance (John preached repentance in preparation for the ministry of Jesus). (*Baptism is only an outward sign of the heart inside.*)

Physical birth – It was common thought (and still is) that **water stood for the physical birth** process. Some believe that Jesus is merely contrasting physical birth (water) with spiritual birth (Spirit). That may be the case, but most tend to think that Jesus is referencing the need for two components in our spiritual rebirth: The word of God (water) and the Spirit's sanctification.

- This **concept was also revolutionary** because Jesus is saying that the **kingdom of heaven is not by their physical birth, (national or ethnic as the Jews thought) – it is spiritual, and personal.** And is only accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
- ***“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit....”*** Jesus is contrasting physical birth and spiritual birth. In order to obtain the kingdom of heaven, we must have spiritual birth, or be born again (an additional birth to the physical birth). Our flesh is corrupt and can only produce more corruption. Only God the Spirit can regenerate, make alive, the spiritual part of us. The flesh is alive, but corrupt, and only headed for death. The spirit is eternal, and needs to be made alive to live in the kingdom of heaven for eternity. It can only come alive under the power of the Holy Spirit, and made clean by the blood of Jesus, and the washing by the Word of God.
- ***“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes...”*** The **wind** cannot be seen or explained, it works mysteriously. The wind can only be heard or observed in relation to its effect. The wind blows as it desires, yet works in powerful and evident ways.
- ***“So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*** This new birth is the same as the mysterious power of the wind. We can't see it, and it can't be fully explained. But we can definitely observe the results. Jesus is trying to make Nicodemus (and us!) understand by using things he knows (like the wind, water, etc.). When someone is born again, we should be able to see the obvious results of a Spirit-filled life.

⁹ *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”* ¹⁰ *Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”* ¹¹ *Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.* ¹² *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

- Nicodemus keeps asking “How?” He asks the same question here as he did the first time. Now Jesus rebukes him, and essentially quiets him. Nicodemus doesn't speak any more after this point. Perhaps he realizes he should just listen. From here on the conversation is one-sided. Jesus teaches and Nicodemus listens.
- ***“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”*** The word for teacher here implies that he was a mentor, one who knows the Word of God and teaches it to others. Jesus' comment implies that as such a teacher, how could he not only be unaware of regeneration, but also apparently incapable of understanding it! (This should be a caution to all who attempt to teach the Word of God. All teachers are held uniquely accountable: ***“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”*** [James 3:1]) Nicodemus should have understood the meaning of these concepts. He was supposed to know the Old Testament thoroughly but didn't understand what it said about the Messiah, and about what God would do through him – especially this teaching on regeneration.

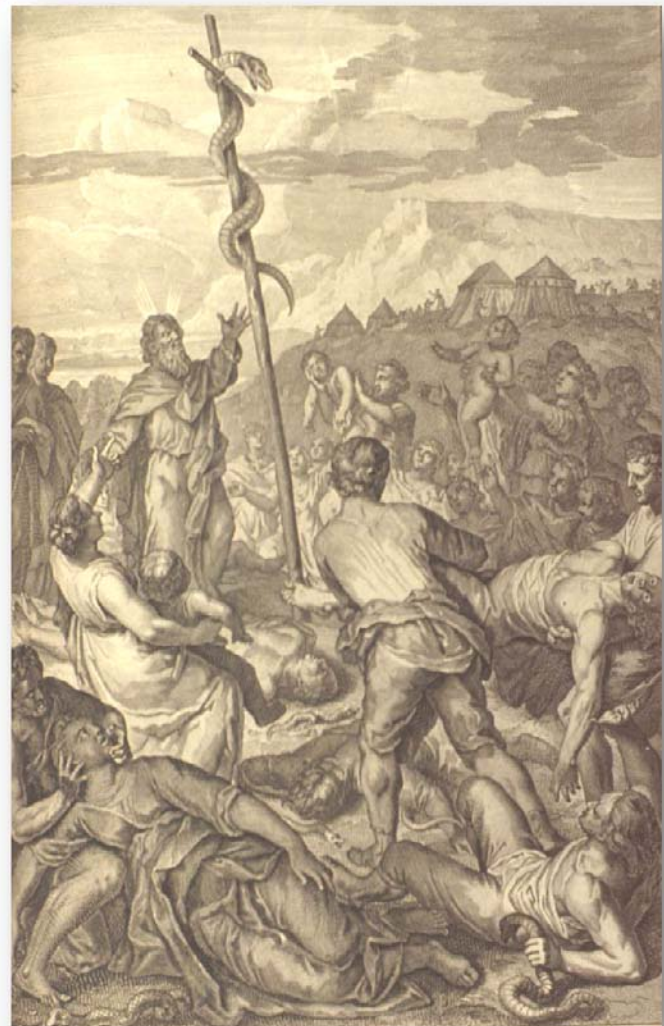
- Nicodemus needed this rebirth, giving him a new heart: *“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”* (Ezekiel 11:19-20) This is the New Covenant Jeremiah spoke of: *“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”* (Jeremiah 31:33)
- The concept of new birth was not a foreign topic in OT Scriptures (see also 1 Samuel 10:6, Isaiah 32:15, Joel 2:28, Ezekiel 37)
- *“We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.”* It is not clear who “we” is here. Scholars disagree on this. It may be the dual testimony of both Jesus and John the Baptist, and may include the prophets, or it may be Jesus and the Father. The fact that He says “what We have seen...” may tend to favor Jesus and the Father. Either way, Jesus is indicating that the Jews, the ruling and authoritative group of Jewish people that Nicodemus represented, do not believe in Him, or what He says.
- *“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”* If Nicodemus did not understand **earthly things**, (like the wind) then he would not understand **heavenly things**. Jesus was in effect saying *“I have tried to make it simple for you by comparing this to things you see in everyday life. But you can’t expect to understand the spiritual truths if you don’t understand the physical ones.”*

¹³ *No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.*

- Jesus clearly states that He alone is qualified to reveal these doctrines, to relate what He knows and what He has seen. No human has seen or knows these things. He is the only one who has been in heaven (still IS!) and can bring these things back down to earth to be known.
- *“...the Son of Man...”* Jesus uses one of His favorite titles for Himself here. This was known to the Jews, and is from Daniel 7:13: *“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.”* “Son of Man” expresses His humility and His current state of humiliation (humanity).
- **There is also another interesting meaning for this title.** By calling Himself the Son of Man, he is identifying Himself with the “last Adam” that Paul will speak of. Adam was the first man, the “father” of man. As the “Son of Man” Jesus is not only human, He is the “last Adam” as opposed to the first. Adam brought death into the world. The Son of Man, the last Adam, will bring life.
“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—... Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.” (Romans 5:12, 14)
“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.... And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” (1 Cor 15:22, 45)
- *“...who is in heaven...”* This is interesting! Some versions take this out, because they cannot understand how Jesus could mean this. How could He be down from Heaven, and still in heaven? He is GOD! He is omni-present! It is critical we take God at his word!! (literally)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

- Jesus uses an event from Numbers 21:4-9, to explain the nature of God's plan of redemption: *"Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived."*
- Sin caused God to punish the Israelites with biting serpents. God commanded Moses to make a brass serpent and raise it up on a pole, so that when those who had been bitten looked up on the bronze serpent, they would be healed. The serpent represented the SIN OF THE PEOPLE. Bronze is symbol of judgment and sin. This sin was LIFTED UP, and people had to look up to it. The Son of Man must **be lifted up** (on the cross) so that man bitten by the enemy might **have eternal life**. Jesus became sin on the cross. He is patiently relating to Nicodemus the entire plan of redemption using a story from the Old Testament that Nicodemus knew well. *This event in Numbers was the last "miracle" that Moses performed (God did it, Moses was just obedient).*
- *"...so must the Son of Man be lifted up,..."* **LIFTED UP** has double meaning. It meant to be exalted, literally raised up, but also it was a euphemism for death on the cross (victim literally lifted up above the earth) at that time. People would understand the use of this term. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, physically above ground level, but he was also lifted up, exalted to his glory. Just like the Jews in the wilderness, we must not just physically look up to Him and see Him on the cross, we must lift our heart spiritually to Him to receive His healing and eternal life.



- Nicodemus may have very well understood the double meaning of this phrase. He may have understood Jesus to use this as meaning He would be crucified. He probably did not understand it at the time, but it is likely Nicodemus remembered his conversation with Jesus about this very thing, at the time of Jesus' crucifixion.

- **The verse in John 3:16 has become so well-known**, so quoted and so presented in its reference form (as we have all seen the signs painted at sporting events "John 3:16") that we may tend to not fully pay attention to the depth and content of that simple yet profound statement. The truths of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus and the Plan of God, are presented in this classic verse.

"For God so loved the world..." The reason for this plan is God's love for us. We did not, and cannot, earn redemption. His love covers the entire world, all of mankind, not just the Jews, or the righteous (of course, we cannot be righteous without the blood of Jesus!)

"...that He gave His only begotten Son..." God had to make a huge sacrifice to get what He wanted. He gave up His only begotten Son to die on a cross so we could be with Him throughout eternity. **This sacrifice shows the amazing extent of His love, and His desire to have a relationship with us.**

"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The result of this sacrifice and this love is that anyone who believes and accepts this gift has eternal life with God and His Son Jesus.

- This verse in John 3:16 is probably the **clearest most direct stating of God's plan** for all of us. Why, how and what. He is not speaking riddles to Nicodemus. He is no longer speaking of the wind or being born again. He is telling Nicodemus straight out what this is all about. We are condemned, but God loves us and provides the only way back to him. Redemption involves a sacrifice, one that we cannot give. God had to give His Son to get us back. This was something the Jews had not reconciled from the scriptures yet, or in their pride refused to understand. But they should have, as Jesus chastised Nicodemus.
- The reference to the event in Numbers 21, coupled with this verse, reveal **several basic doctrinal truths** we must understand for our salvation:

- 1: **All mankind are sinners, and all sinners are doomed to death.** We are dead in the Law, and stricken by a deadly disease (sin). There is no human cure for our sin. We cannot save ourselves, and no other human can save us. Also, like one guilty of a crime, we are sentenced to death. There is no human pardon.
- 2: **Sin is deadly** and destructive, just like the effects of being bitten by a deadly serpent and filled with poisonous venom.
- 3: The only method of healing, recovery from this deadly disease, is **looking up to the One who is able to save us**, and believing on His power and gift of His life for us. The Law cannot save us, because we cannot keep the Law perfectly.

- **To Nicodemus, a Pharisee, the Law was perfect.** It had everything you needed to be saved. Just keep the Law, which they thought they could do, and you're in. But the Law only brings death, because no one is able to keep every letter of the Law. Now Jesus was saying something else was needed. And what was needed was the One speaking to Nicodemus.
- The Jews understood that the Messiah would come to **condemn the Gentiles.** This was false teaching. Jesus told Nicodemus that God's plan was to save the whole world. This is plainly found in the Old Testament as well, but the Jews became quite arrogant and prideful about being the "chosen" ones – leaving everyone else out of God's plan. Jesus is setting this straight.

- ***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”*** The first time Jesus came, He did not come to condemn. He came to die and save. The second time, however, He will come to judge. Condemnation is reserved for those who do not believe. There are only two kinds of people in the world: (1) those who have everlasting life as a result of faith in Jesus; and (2) those who have not believed and as a result stand **condemned already**. They are already sentenced and await only the execution of that sentence. Before our last breath, however, it is not too late to be saved. All that is necessary is recognizing the 3 points above: we are all sinners, we are condemned to death as a result of our sins, we can only be saved by faith in Jesus and His atoning work on the cross—then repenting of those sins and receiving the free gift of salvation.
- God’s boundless grace is seen in this passage, but it becomes even more remarkable when we understand what Paul says in Romans 5:8: ***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** God did all this before we even came to Him, and He did it even for those who will never come to Him. That is remarkable.
- **We could call these verses the Gospel in a Nutshell.** God’s plan of redeeming mankind is contained here (verses 14-17). We should remember this, as it makes the simplest most straightforward statement of what, and WHO, we need to know to be saved.
- **INTERESTING NOTE:** Later in this same gospel (John 9:39) Jesus says: ***“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”*** How can both of these statements be true? The one in this verse: ***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world,...”*** and the one in chapter 9? **COMMENTARY: If, when a man is confronted with Jesus, his soul responds to that wonder and beauty, he is on the way to salvation. But if, when he is confronted with Jesus, he sees nothing lovely, he stands condemned. His reaction has condemned him. God sent Jesus in love. He sent him for that man’s salvation; but that which was sent in love has become a condemnation. It is not God who has condemned the man; God only loved him; the man has condemned himself....** Jesus said He did not come to condemn the world. The world is already condemned, and has been since the Fall. The actual “punishment” phase for this condemnation would not be during His first coming. That would be later, at His second coming. But the statement in chapter 9 indicates He came for judgment, or the “division” of people into the two groups of “saved” and “lost.” By believing His message, we are saved. By rejecting Him and His message we are lost, pre-judged to condemnation, which will be completed when He returns. *We will discuss the other unusual aspects of this verse from chapter 9 when we get to that place.*

¹⁸ ***“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*** ¹⁹ ***And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*** ²⁰ ***For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*** ²¹ ***But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”***

- ***“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*** Jesus states the obvious here, that those who believe in the gift of God’s Son (*from the previous verse*) “is not condemned.” In other words, he (or she) has received a pardon and will live. But the one who does not believe stands condemned (by the Law, because we cannot keep it perfectly). They continue in their condemnation.

- He did not come to condemn the first time, because that condemnation has been since the Fall. All mankind is condemned because of sin. The pardon from death is received only by belief in the sacrifice of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. The actual punishment will be carried out later. It is as if the condemned stands on “death row” even though the punishment (consequences for unbelief) has not yet been carried out.
- ***“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*** Jesus further explains exactly what this condemnation is. The Light, the Truth, has come into the world to reveal man’s sin, and the way to eternal life through His sacrifice. But because evil men have preferred the darkness of deception and self-serving lusts and deeds, they rejected that light. Thus, they are condemned to die in their sins. Evil hates light, because it exposes sin.
- **John the Gospel writer further clarifies this is one of his letters:** *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”* (1 John 1:5-10)
- **COMMENTARY:** By his reaction to Jesus Christ, a man stands revealed and his soul laid bare. If he regards Christ with love, even with wistful yearning, for him there is hope; but if in Christ he sees nothing attractive he has condemned himself. He who was sent in love has become to him judgment.
- ***“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”***²¹ ***But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”*** No one likes the light to expose them when they are doing what they shouldn’t. This is the heart of evil mankind. When we recognize that we have sinned, and desire what God offers, we willingly come into the Light of Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Thereafter, the light will reveal our good deeds, a good life lived to please Jesus, not a life hidden in the dark and sinful shadows of the world. Jesus’ words here are an echo of John’s introduction in chapter 1 about the Light of the world and the darkness that rejected Him. ***“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”*** (John 1:5)

²² *After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.*²³ *Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.*²⁴ *For John had not yet been thrown into prison.*²⁵ *Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification.*²⁶ *And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”*

- Again, John provides careful details about where Jesus went, and what He did. He is now in Judea again. We don’t know if He traveled back to Galilee in the north after the end of chapter 2 and there met with Nicodemus, then returned to Judea, or if He stayed in Judea after the cleansing of the Temple, making it possible for Nicodemus to find Him at night and meet with Him. At any rate, now John tells us that Jesus is in the southern area of Judea (where Jerusalem is), and He is staying there for awhile, apparently also baptizing, as was John the Baptist. John lets us know this is a time before John the Baptist’s imprisonment.

- And herein lies the problem in these verses. John the Baptist had a loyal following of disciples, just as Jesus did. These “talmudim” (*Hebrew word for disciples*) **were very protective of their Masters**. We hear them now arguing with “the Jews” (*the aristocratic class of wealthy and influential ruling Jews, not the country folk*) about “purification.”
- The word for “**purification**” here is the Greek word *katharismos* (interesting to note this is obviously where we get our English word “catharsis”). This was ceremonial cleansing, not the atoning or forgiveness of sins as Jesus taught. The Pharisees in particular were very big into ceremony, ritual and tradition regarding their “cleansing.”
- **“Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”** We don’t hear of the outcome of this so-called argument about purification, but it most likely arose when John the Baptist preached baptism and the repentance of sin, even for the Jews (*something they didn’t think they needed!*). However, now we hear a complaint from one of John the Baptist’s disciples. They have received word that Jesus, the one John the Baptist pointed to as Messiah, was now nearby also baptizing. They are actually complaining that the people are going to Jesus, and not to John the Baptist!
- There is a **very real bit of jealousy in this statement**. It is apparent that John’s disciples are concerned about the increasing popularity of Jesus, and the decreasing popularity of John. Each teacher (rabbi) had his following of faithful *talmudim*, and if your following was the biggest, you were the best. They all competed with each other for this self-appointed honor, and these disciples are upset. We haven’t changed much, have we?!
- Even though John the Baptist had pointed people to Jesus, including his own disciples (remember Andrew and John in the first chapter...“Behold the Lamb of God...”), these followers of John still did not understand the real identity of this new teacher on the block. John will have to set their thinking straight.

²⁷ *John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.”* ²⁸ *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’* ²⁹ *He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.* ³⁰ *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

- **“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.”** John quickly replied that whatever anyone has is given to them from heaven, from God – even their position, their followers, and their futures. John understood well what many people fail to understand about one of God’s divine truths. Everything comes from Him. He is trying to re-orient his disciples’ thinking to realize that no one can claim anything other than what God gives them. It is not on our own merits, but by His grace and will.
- **“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’”** John also fully understood his role. He was not just another competing rabbi in the Judean countryside. He was not keeping a tally on his disciple count. He knew precisely why he was there, and what he was to do. Here he reminds his disciples that he is not the Christ, and said so. The one they were pointing to as a “competitor” IS the Christ (the Messiah)! His willingness to take a back seat to Jesus is remarkable, especially in that day when rabbis competed for disciples.

- ***He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.*** John tries to explain his position by using a beautiful analogy. He compares himself to "the friend of the bridegroom." In those days, this was equivalent to our "best man" but this person had many more responsibilities than just giving a nice toast at the end of the ceremony. The "friend of the bridegroom" was often charged with seeing to all the logistics and details of the marriage celebration. He literally prepared the way for the groom to travel through the streets to collect his bride. He was often "behind the scenes" and unappreciated, compared to the husband-to-be. When the shouts of joy rose up as the bridegroom was seen and heard, the crowds cheered and joined the celebration. John is equating himself to the best man, the man preparing the way for Jesus, and the voice of the bridegroom gives John great joy. John the Baptist is pointing to the spiritual truth of the Bridegroom and Bride relationship of Jesus and His Church. He is the "friend of the bridegroom" preparing the way, and steps aside once the Bridegroom is seen. (*Our Bridegroom has drawn up the contract and paid the price for His Bride. He has gone to prepare a place for us, and will return for us soon.*)
- ***"He must increase, but I must decrease."*** This is a most remarkable statement, and one that underscores the fact that John the Baptist truly knew, understood, and embraced his role as the forerunner of the Messiah. He knew it wasn't about him, it was ALL about the bridegroom Jesus. Notice the **must**. In God's plan John must decrease and Jesus must continue to grow. The whole purpose was to get people to follow Jesus and be saved by Him, not to follow John the Baptist. His role was winding down, and John probably knew this. Yet in this he takes great joy. An amazing man.



³¹ ***He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.*** ³² ***And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.*** ³³ ***He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.*** ³⁴ ***For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.*** ³⁵ ***The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.***

- ***"He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all."*** John again is telling of Jesus' pre-eminence. He is from above, and therefore above all. Any human is of the earth, and as such, can only address things of the earth. As one from heaven, Jesus is above all, and can speak of heavenly things.
- ***"And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony."*** John the Baptist reiterates here that Jesus is the only one qualified to tell of heavenly things, because He has been there and is from there! He is not "of the earth" He is of heaven, "above all." Sadly, he also states that people are not receiving His word, His witness of heavenly things.
- ***"He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true."*** The word for "received" here literally means to "get hold of." That means to understand and comprehend, and believe the words of Jesus. "Certified" is the Greek word *sphragizō* which means to "stamp with a signet ring" or to attest something as true. There were a few who believed, and John says the person who does believe in Jesus' testimony has in himself attested to the truth of Jesus words.

- ***“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God,...”*** Jesus is the faithful witness of the Father. Whatever Jesus speaks, are the very words of God Himself.
- ***“...for God does not give the Spirit by measure.”*** The fullness of God is in Jesus. God has poured out the whole of Himself into His Son. His Spirit is not just in pieces or measured carefully. It is fully contained in Jesus. Jesus has received all things from the Father. And this statement may also be applied to believers. God gives us the full measure of His Holy Spirit. **We decide**, however, how much authority and area He has in us to work. He can give Him full uncensored access to our lives, or we can try to control His input.
- ***“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.”*** The intimate relationship between the Father and the Son is beyond our comprehension. Here John the Baptist states the complete love of the Father for Jesus, and the fact that God has given everything He has to give to Jesus, including His full authority to accomplish His plan perfectly.

³⁶ ***He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”***

- What John says here is precisely what Jesus said in the earlier portion of this chapter (verse 18). Those who believe in Jesus have been saved to eternal life with Him. They have been pardoned from the death penalty brought by sin. Anyone who does not believe, is already condemned to death – eternal separation from God.
- ***“...the wrath of God...”*** The wrath of God could be described as the necessary holy and righteous reaction to evil – it must be destroyed, and removed from His presence. This is the condemnation Jesus spoke of.
- As both Jesus and John speak of in this chapter, **all mankind is condemned to death**. This death penalty is only lifted by Jesus, and by our belief in His testimony. This “death penalty” is the **“second death” spoken of in Revelation**:

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” (Revelation 2:11)

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:6)

“Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” (Rev 20:1-4)
“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:7-9)

It is interesting for us to note here that it may be the fear of God’s eternal wrath that brings us into the kingdom, but once we know of His Son, and have a personal relationship with Him, it is love for Jesus that keeps us there!

- This **last statement by John the Baptist is perhaps his most powerful testimony to the importance of following Jesus**. John had already pointed to Jesus to get people to follow Him and not John. He underscored this critical move with these words. From this point on, John the Baptist’s ministry declined, as God ordained it would, and he was imprisoned shortly. We don’t know how many of John’s disciples followed Jesus at this point, perhaps all of them. If they wanted to honor John’s entire life and message, they would have done that.

