John Chapter 3

1There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

- Nicodemus was a Pharisee ……… and quite possibly a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin which was comprised of about 70 members.

 o He is not mentioned in the other Gospels.

 o He is generally thought to be a man of wealth ……… primarily based on the cost involved in providing the burial spices for Jesus’ burial (a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds’weight)

 o The Pharisees were the dominant sect of the Jews.
   - The Sadducees and the Essenes were the other two prominent religious sects.

 o Concerning the Pharisees ……… Barclay makes this comment ……… “In many ways the Pharisees were the best people in the whole country. There were never more than 6,000 of them; they were what was known as a chaburah, or brotherhood. They entered into this brotherhood by taking a pledge in front of three witnesses that they would spend all their lives observing every detail of the scribal law.”

 o “A ruler of the Jews” ……… Coffman says this is …… “a title reserved in Rabbinic literature "for a great man, or a prince." as he references ……… Herbert Lockyer, All the Men of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1958), p. 259.

   - Lenski says ……… “The fact that Nicodemus was “a ruler of the Jews,” must here, in Jerusalem, mean that he was a member of the Sanhedrin; as such he appears also in the session of this body in 7:50.”

2This 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.

- He came to Jesus by night. And we ask why?
I think it was to get his full attention ..... without getting into a public debate or confrontation in order to more fully understand and to be convinced of who Jesus really was and what he needed to do.

- A normal conversation .... is usually more beneficial to understanding than a verbal battle or public debate.

Some believe he came by night because of fear.

- Perhaps ..... but I don’t really believe so because of what is said in the other two verses where Nicodemus is mentioned.

- John 7:50-51 ..... 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” RSV

  - He was the lone voice among the gathered Pharisees to point out the fact that they were failing to keep their own law.

- John 19:38-40 ..... 38 After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body. 39 Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds’ weight. 40 They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. RSV

  - This act of open dedication ..... put some of Jesus’ disciples (the apostles to be) to shame as their faith faltered at the cross of Christ.

  - Joseph of Arimathea ..... also showed great courage at the cross in asking Pilate for the body of Jesus although it is said of him that he had been a secret disciple of Jesus because of his fear of the Jews.
This fear of the Jews is not said of Nicodemus ……. although it is still certainly possible.

Lenski adds these thoughts ….. “The fact that Nicodemus came “at night” was, of course, due to fear lest he be seen, and thus his standing be compromised. Yet this is not cowardice but rather careful caution, for, although Jesus had made an impression on Nicodemus, the man was not sure about this young Rabbi from Galilee who might turn out a disappointment after all. So he cautiously investigates. The fact that Nicodemus “came to him,” taking the risk involved, shows his seriousness, shows how deeply Jesus had gripped his heart. He did not ignore or wipe out the impression made on him. He took a step that was certainly decisive. In the study of conversion Nicodemus, like the Samaritan woman, will always stand out as an illuminating example.”

Overall ….. it does not seem to me ……. that from these verses Nicodemus was a cowardly fear stricken man. He was thinking for himself, and making an honest attempt to find out the truth. He came forth with statements and action that were everything but fearful and cowardly, especially when you consider his position among the Pharisees. Others, in like positions as his, stood aloof from Jesus and never really bothered to even attempt to talk to Him face to face. They just proceeded blindly ahead in the face of overwhelming evidence.

- Of course we can only speculate.

- He then goes on to say ….. ‘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.

This statement takes us back to the last three verses of chapter two ….. and we remember the impact that Jesus has made during this week long Passover Feast.
We notice verse 23 in particular …… 23Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. NKJV

- We don’t have any record of what these signs were …… but they were obviously very convincing.

- It also seems quite likely to me …… that Nicodemus was aware of the temple cleansing since he was a prominent leader among the Jews.

- News like that traveled quickly even without our mass media!

- Think about it …… this is very early in Jesus’ ministry, and among the tens of thousands of people at the Passover, Jesus manages to gain attention that both convinces many people to believe on Him, because they saw the signs He was doing; while at the same time, making the Jewish leadership stand amazed and in a daze because of the temple cleansing.”

- It is no wonder that Nicodemus calls Jesus “Rabbi.”

- This indicates the deep affect the “signs” that Jesus did had on Nicodemus and many others.

- He says …… You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.

- It is important, at this point …… to remember the comments that we ended chapter 2 with.

- The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series" makes this statement …… “As you follow our Lord’s ministry in John’s Gospel, you see Him moving gradually out of the bright light of popularity and into the dark shadows of rejection. At the beginning, it was easy for people to follow the crowd and watch His miracles. But then, His words began to penetrate hearts, with conviction following; and conviction leads
either to conversion or opposition. It is impossible to be neutral. People had to decide, and most of them decided against Him.”

- **This is where Nicodemus is at!**

  o He obviously believes that Jesus is, at the very least a teacher come from God, because he clearly says that much.

    - **It also seems obvious …..** that Nicodemus is most likely wondering if Jesus might not indeed be the long awaited Messiah.

  o **Jesus passes right on by …..** the respectful and even flattering address of “Rabbi” and gets right to the heart of the question weighing on Nicodemus’ inquiring mind.

    - **Someone has said that Nicodemus is much like the “rich young ruler” …….. accept, of course, he would be called the “rich old ruler.”**

      - **He wonders …….. as did the “rich young ruler” ……..** 17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” RSV

        Mark 10:17

    - **Jesus doesn’t even wait on a Nicodemus to ask the question …….. he knows what he’s thinking.**

      “5Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

- **Jesus captures his attention, first of all, with the solemn words …….. “Most assuredly” or “Verily, verily” as some translations have it.**

  o **In other words …….. this is an important matter!**

  o **Born “again” ……..** as translated here in the NKJV is a better rendering than the alternate translation of born “from above.”

    - **Coffman makes this comment ……..** “The marginal reading "from above" is preferred by some, but such a rendition is too vague, omitting the element of meaning which appears in the
word "again." The new birth is another, a second birth; and, although in a sense the second birth is from above, so also in another sense is the first birth, or natural birth. Thus, "born again" is more explicit and correct.

This statement must be seen, first and foremost, as declaring the absolute necessity of this new birth.

- This declaration obviously completely overwhelmed Nicodemus!
  - Without this new birth Jesus says “he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
- As a devout “Pharisee” and “ruler of the Jews,” he undoubtedly thought that a place in “the kingdom of God” was reserved for him due to his descent from Abraham and his zealous dedication to the traditions of the elders.
- He no doubt gloried in his parentage as Paul once did.
  - Philippians 3:5 If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; NIV
- Again Nicodemus believed that Jesus was come from God because of the “signs” He did.
  - But as yet he had not come to the realization of his need to be born again.
  - This was overwhelmingly hard for an entrenched legalistic Pharisee to understand.
- Jesus wanted Nicodemus to see the possibility of an eternity in heaven and that hope was in the son of man.
  - Nicodemus will also shortly learn that “the kingdom of God” will include both Jews and Gentiles who are willing to accept the grace of
God’s offer of redemption and who will change their lives accordingly.

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?”

- Changed lives and spiritual insight ..... seems to be completely foreign thoughts to Nicodemus at this point.

- Because of this ..... he basically ridicules the thought of a literal new birth.

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

- We first want to put this verse in the proper context ..... Coffman makes this remark ..... “At the time Jesus revealed this teaching to Nicodemus, the great commission had not been given; and the immediate application of the teaching to Nicodemus regarded John's baptism which was mandatory for all the followers of Jesus prior to the resurrection; but the glowing words of this passage anticipated the Great Commission and the baptism therein commanded, thus making the passage equally applicable to all of subsequent ages who would enter God's kingdom.”

- Nicodemus obviously needed to be baptized with John’s baptism ..... John called for repentance that would lead to a radical change of life.

- It seems apparent that he had not received John’s baptism. And in view of the prevailing attitude of his peers this is not to surprising.

  - Luke 7:28 – 30 ..... 28 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” 29 (When they heard this all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John; 30 but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.) RSV

  - Matthew 3:5 – 9 ..... 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit that befits repentance, 9 and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have
Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. **RSV**

- **John 3:3 – 5** is one of the most controversial passages in the Bible.

  - To many of us ..... these verses seem very straightforward. **They seem that way to others also** ..... **but they arrive at completely different conclusions.**

  - **For this reason** ..... we need to understand what some of the **different views** are and to some extent where those views come from.

  - **Consider the following comment from John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes (Methodist)**

    **…… as he talks about John 3:3** ....... Verse 3. Jesus answered - That knowledge will not avail thee unless thou be born again - Otherwise thou canst not see, that is, experience and enjoy, either the inward or the glorious kingdom of God. In this solemn discourse our Lord shows, that no external profession, no ceremonial ordinances or privileges of birth, could entitle any to the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom: that an entire change of heart as well as of life was necessary for that purpose: that this could only be wrought in man by the almighty power of God: that every man born into the world was by nature in a state of sin, condemnation, and misery: that the free mercy of God had given his Son to deliver them from it, and to raise them to a blessed immortality: that all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, might share in these benefits, procured by his being lifted up on the cross, and to be received by faith in him: but that if they rejected him, their eternal, aggravated condemnation, would be the certain consequence. **Except a man be born again** - If our Lord by being born again means only reformation of life, instead of making any new discovery, he has only thrown a great deal of obscurity on what was before plain and obvious.

  - **Consider next these remarks by W.W. Wiersbe in the Bible Exposition Commentary (Baptist)**

    **……. Jesus was not teaching that the new birth comes through water baptism. In the New Testament, baptism is connected with death, not birth; and no amount of physical water can effect a spiritual change in a person. The emphasis in John 3:14–21 is on believing, because salvation comes through faith (Eph. 2:8–9).** The evidence of salvation is the witness of the Spirit within (Rom. 8:9).

Water baptism is certainly a part of our obedience to Christ and our witness for Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 2:41). But it must not be made an essential for salvation; otherwise, none of the Old Testament saints was ever saved, nor was the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43). In every age, there has been but one way of salvation—faith in God’s promise—though the outward evidence of that faith has changed from age to age.

Human birth involves travail (John 16:21), and so does the birth from above. Our Saviour had to travail on the cross so that we might become members of the family of God (Isa. 53:11). Concerned believers have to travail in prayer and witness as they seek to lead sinners to Christ (1 Cor. 4:15; Gal. 4:19).

The child inherits the nature of the parents, and so does the child of God. We become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Nature determines appetite, which explains why the Christian has an appetite for the things of God (1 Peter 2:2–3). He has no desire to go back to the foul things of the world that once appealed to him (2 Peter 2:20–22). He feeds on the Word of God and grows into spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:11–14).

The Fourfold Gospel Commentary …… makes this statement — “Men would have no difficulty in understanding this passage were it not that its terms apparently exclude "the pious unimmersed" from Christ's kingdom. But difficulties, however distressing, will justify no man in wrestling the Scriptures of God (2 Peter 3:16; Romans 3:4).”

- A number of doctrines …… are involved in the religious thoughts and background of different people that influence their conclusions concerning being “born again.”

- Among those doctrines …… are the doctrine of original sin, the sovereignty of God, justification, predestination, baptism viewed as a sacrament, faith only, and a lack of discrimination concerning the dispensations of the Old and New Testament.

- The People’s New Testament …… Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Jesus does not reply directly to the question of Nicodemus, but proceeds to give a more explicit statement concerning the new birth. One must be born of
water and of the Spirit. Whatever this may mean, it will be admitted by all
(1) that no one is a member of the kingdom of God until he is born again;
(2) that the Savior declares the impossibility of one entering who is not
born of water and of the Spirit. All agree that the birth of the Spirit refers
to the inward, or spiritual change that takes place, and all candid
authorities agree that born of water refers to baptism. So Alford, Wesley,
Abbott, Whitby, Olshausen, Tholuck, Prof. Wm. Milligan, the Episcopal
Prayer Book, the Westminster Confession, the M. E. Discipline, and M.
E. Doctrinal Tracts, and also the writers of the early Church all declare.
Alford says: "All attempts to get rid of this have sprung from doctrinal
prejudices." Abbott says: "We are to understand Christ as he expected his
auditor to understand him. John the Baptist baptized both Jew and Gentile
as a sign of purification by repentance from past sins. Nicodemus would
then have certainly understood by the expression, 'born of water,' a
reference to this rite of baptism."

- **Johnson goes on to say** …… “We are born naturally into the
  kingdom of nature, to live the natural life; if we enter the kingdom of
  heaven, the kingdom of grace, it must be by a new birth. The doctrine that
  a man can bury his old sinful life, and begin a new one with the freshness
  of youthful hope, is foreshadowed in the Old Testament (Isa 1:18; Jer
  31:33 Eze 11:19; 36:26), and taught in the New Testament (Rm. 6:8; 8:3;
  12:2; 2Co 5:17; Gal. 6:15,16).”

- **Speaking of Nicodemus** …… **Guy N. Wood’s says** …… “Since active life begins at birth, it was necessary for Nicodemus to
  learn that he was as yet not suited for the kingdom of God, not having
  been born “anew."

  - **John the Baptist said he needed to** …… “Bear fruit
    that befits repentance” and do not presume to say to yourselves,
    ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from
    these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

    - **We don’t know** …… if Nicodemus ever fully
      made that decision and obeyed by being
      baptized or not. **We certainly hope he did.**

- **For the Christian this change of life or new creation is
  the theme** …… of Romans chapter 6, Galatians 5 and
  2Peter chapter 1.

  - **A changed life requires one to die to sin** …… to
    walk in newness of life. **We are saved by grace
    but we will be judged on the lives we lived.**
• **Ephesians 2:8-10 …**  For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. RSV

• **2Corinthians 5:9-10 …** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body. RSV

• **The New Living Translation makes this commentary remark about these verses …** "While eternal life is a free gift given on the basis of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8,9), each of us will be judged by Christ. He will reward us for how we lived. God’s gracious gift of salvation does not free us from the requirement of faithful obedience. All Christians must give account on the day of judgment of how they lived

• **Matthew 16:27 …** For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. KJV

• **Romans 14:10-12 …** But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. KJV

• **1Cor. 3:10-15 …** According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. KJV
The old man is crucified.

- You are a slave to the one you obey …… of
  sin, which leads to death.

- Or …… of obedience which leads to
  righteousness. (Rom. 6:16)

**We also need to view all these things “in the right spirit” and with a “proper attitude.”**

**We all need help …… in our understanding of these teachings.**

- Eph. 4:15-16 ……  
  15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,  
  16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love. *RSV*

- Rom. 12:16 ……  
  16 Live in harmony with each other. Don’t try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all! *NLT*

**Our prayer ought to be …… God grant us some of your great patience and long suffering as we talk to and teach other people. Help others to have that same loving patience with us.**

- I liked these remarks by John Hobbs in his book “Searching for Biblical Truth.” He says …… “Notice that Jesus uses the words “except” and “must” in these verses. Therefore, he is making the new birth mandatory and necessary! Every person must be born again. No one is exempt. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2.11; Eph. 6:9). If there are any exceptions to the except clause, let God make them – not you or me! In Romans 9:15, God said, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

> 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.’

- Wood’s and those whom he quotes covers the above two verses pretty well.
He says ….. “What, then, is meant by being born of water and the Spirit? To enter the kingdom in to be saved. (Col. 1:13, 14.) To be saved one must believe, repent, confess and be baptized for (unto) the remission of sins. (Heb. 11:6; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:38.) To enter the kingdom one must be born of water and the Spirit. Since things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, it follows that to be born of water and the Spirit is to believe the gospel, repent of one’s sins, confess one’s faith in Christ and be baptized for the remission of sins. John 3:5 figuratively states what is literally affirmed in Acts 2:38. To be born “anew” is simply to obey the gospel. It is not surprising that those who deny to baptism its proper place among the conditions of pardon would interrupt “water” in John 3:5 to mean something other than baptism; in so doing, they are in conflict with the scholarship of the world, both ancient and modern. Henry Alford, one of the translators of the American Standard Version, wrote that “all attempts to get rid” of baptism in this passage, “have sprung from doctrinal prejudices by which the views of expositors have been warped,” and Hooker, himself a writer of more than a hundred years ago, said that “of all the ancient writers there is not one to be named who ever expounded this text otherwise than as implying external baptism.” One is begotten of the Spirit by believing the Word which the Spirit gave, and born of water by coming forth from the waters of baptism.

The flesh produces fleshly life: the Spirit begets spiritual life. Nicodemus had thusfar only known the first; the second he must experience before he could enter and enjoy the blessings and benefits of the kingdom. The law that like begets like was and is a universal one and Nicodemus ought to have perceived it, instead of marveling at it. It is as immutable and unchangeable as the law of gravity.”

Concerning …….. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ……. B.W. Johnson says ……. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The necessity is implied in the word "kingdom" [Jn. 3:5]. No one born a citizen of England can become a citizen of the United States without complying with our naturalization laws. The kingdom of God has its naturalization laws, and there is no other way of entrance than to be born of water and of the Spirit. We may not understand all the mysteries of the new birth, any more than we do those of the natural birth, but we can understand what has to be done and what is necessary. Two things are needful: the spirit must be renewed; we must be baptized.”

“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.”
The main difficulty with this verse is in the translation of the Greek word used for Spirit.

- The same Greek word …… is translated “wind” in the first part of the verse and then as “Spirit” or “spirit” in the last part of the passage.

- Guy N. Wood’s makes this statement ….. “There is, perhaps, no passage in the scriptures more misunderstood or more improperly used, regarding the new birth, than this. It is usually cited in an effort to show that as the wind’s operations are unknown so also is the Spirit’s mode of operation in the new birth.”

- E.W. Bullinger says …….. “The word pneuma (Spirit) occurs several hundred times in the Greek New Testament. In no other instance do the standard translations render it wind.”

  - Wood’s in the Gospel Advocate Commentary ….. goes to great length to illustrate what he calls the “absurdity” of rendering the word pneuma as wind.

- John 3:8a ….. (The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes) RSV

- This is a comparative phrase …….. and to a large extent much like a parenthetical phrase except for the fact that it can not be left out and make much sense.

- Lenski makes this comment …….. Sometimes this illustration has been misapplied by commentators because they fail to discover the point of comparison. They find three such points, whereas every true comparison has but one. This is also done by those who stress the clause, “wherever it will,” and then speak of the free and unrestricted working of the Spirit. This misconception often becomes serious, for it easily leads to the false dogmatic idea that the Spirit regenerates this or that man at random, passing over the rest. It may also lead to the error that the Spirit works without means, suddenly seizing a man to convert and regenerate (or sanctify) him, whereas the Scriptures teach that the Spirit always and only works to save through his chosen means, the Word and the Sacraments, and through these means equally upon all men whenever and wherever these means reach men. The fact that all who are thus reached by the Spirit are not reborn is not due to a lack of saving will on the part of the Spirit, or to a lack and deficiency in the means the Spirit employs, but to the wicked and permanent resistance of those who remain unregenerate. Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51-53; 13:46.

- Lenski’s point above is well taken with the exclusion of his reference to Sacraments. The significance of sacraments varies among denominations and
believers today. Some believe the sacraments are the only means of salvation and that they have a special force that guarantees forgiveness of sins. Others think they represent God’s grace, which can be received in many ways; they are traditionally practiced but not required for salvation. Harper’s Bible Dictionary

- The comparison of “the one born of the Spirit” …… is made with the wind …… in most translations.

  - We will talk about another possible translation of this verse shortly.

  - First …… if this translation is correct …… and Jesus is comparing the one born of the Spirit with the wind:
    - Without much doubt …… He is trying to get the physical fleshly thought process of Nicodemus into the spiritual realm.
    - Just as you cannot see the wind …… but you can see what it does …… so it is with the one born of the Spirit.
    - This then basically becomes …… an explanation of the reality of the spiritual birth.
    - For instance …… no one can see the fact that one’s sins have been remitted and forgiven by God …… but that does not deny the reality of it.

  - In the same way you cannot see an outward physical change in one after his new birth.
    - But there is a difference (at least there should be) …… in the way he begins to act, speak, and live.
    - There is a change …… but it is no more visible to the naked eye that the wind.
The change is in the manner of life, not the physical appearance.

A new way of life begins at the point of being “born again” based on one’s repentance and obedient faith.

1 John 1:5-7 ….. 
5 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. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 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. NKJV

Colossians 3:1-7 gives us an overview of this process:

The New Life in Christ

3 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! 12 As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another
and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**RSV**

- **One exception to the majority of translations is …**

  *The Living Oracles* translation which reads as follows:

  ▪ **John 3:8** – The Spirit breathes where he pleases, and you hear the report of him, but know not whence he comes, or whither he goes; so is every one who is born of the Spirit.

    ▪ **With this translation the comparison of the one “born of the Spirit” ........ is made with “the Spirit breathes” instead of with ”the wind.”**

    ▪ **Guy N. Woods says the passage may be freely rendered as follows:**

      - “The Spirit breathes as he will, you hear his voice but you cannot tell whence he comes or whither he goes, so through hearing his voice is every one born who is born of the Spirit. That is, *The Spirit breathes* (expresses himself) *through the word of truth* (the gospel), *in full harmony with his will* and you receive the expression of this will by means of this word; and while you cannot see the Spirit and are thus without visual evidence of his coming and going it is by means of hearing his voice (as expressed through the word) that you are born anew.”

  - **B.W. Johnson says ........ (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.)** Most commentators have held that this means: "As
the wind moves mysteriously, so does the Spirit, and it breathes upon whom it will, effecting the inward change called the birth of the Spirit arbitrarily.” This view I believe due to a wrong translation, sanctioned, not by Greek, but by current theology.

- E.W. Bullinger, B.W. Johnson, and Guy N. Woods all make a good case for the consistent rendering of the Greek word for Spirit – “Pneuma” – at least to this “untaught in the Greek” but somewhat logical mind. It is obviously a hard verse to translate into English.

We know for sure that verse 6 is involved here ….. As the flesh produces physical life, the Spirit produces spiritual life.

- 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

- Key Point ….. Spiritual life or regeneration is the concern here no matter which translation is used.

Consider the following verses in light of this conclusion:

- **Isaiah 55:6-11** ….. Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near: 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. **ASV**

- **1Corinthians 3:4-7** ….. For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants
is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. NKJV

- **Luke 8:4-15** …… And when a great multitude came together, and they of every city resorted unto him, he spake by a parable:  
  5 The sower went forth to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it.  
  6 And other fell on the rock; and as soon as it grew, it withered away, because it had no moisture.  
  7 And other fell amidst the thorns; and the thorns grew with it, and choked it.  
  8 And other fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold. As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.  
  9 And his disciples asked him what this parable might be.  
  10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to the rest in parables; that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.  
  11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.  
  12 And those by the way side are they that have heard; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved.  
  13 And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.  
  14 And that which fell among the thorns, these are they that have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.  
  15 And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience ASV

- **John 3:8b** …… so is every one that is born of the Spirit. ASV

- **1Peter 1:23-25** ……  
  23 You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;  
  24 for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,  
  25 but the word of the Lord abides for ever.” That word is the good news which was preached to you. RSV

- **Eph. 4:17-24** ……  
  17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds.  
  18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.  
  19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.  
  20 That is not the way you learned Christ!  
  21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in
Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. RSV

- In conclusion I would like to pass on two remarks made by John Hobbs in his book “Search for Biblical Truth” that both sums up much of what I believe concerning verses 5 thru 8 as well as touching on another prevalent view among many in Churches of Christ that space and time does not permit adequate response:

- He says …… “There are some scholars in our brotherhood, like Burton Coffman and Dr. Allen Black, that believe that being “born of the Spirit” is the same thing as receiving “the gift of the Holy Spirit” when one is baptized (Acts 2:38). While many agree with their view of Acts 2:38, some disagree with them of John 3:5. But, I certainly would not make an issue of their belief. One strong reason why some disagree with them is because John 3:5 and Ephesians 5:26 and Titus 3:5 help to explain each other. Taking these three verses together, being “born of spirit” is discussing a birth that comes through the word of God that comes from the Holy Spirit. This is why I believe that if one capitalizes the word “Spirit,” we still have a viable translation. This problem is worth discussion; it is not worth division or disharmony. May we please remember this important fact! Let us give “diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

- Note: I did not plan to discuss the topic that was briefly commented on above concerning the “gift of the Holy Spirit,” but it was brought up in class so I feel compelled to give a brief overview of my thoughts on the subject. The receiving of the Holy Spirit at the point of baptism is what I was taught 30 some years ago when I was first converted. This is basically the view referred to above which is held by Burton Coffman and evidently by Dr. Allen Black of whom I am not familiar. At the time when I was taught it was commonly referred to as “the non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” Which, in and of it’s self, is a contradiction in terms. If you don't believe that fact try defending this position with a Pentecostal who believes miraculous gifts are still available to Christians today and who uses the same verses to prove that those miraculous gifts are still available today. Pentecostal’s don’t recognize that those miraculous gifts ended in the first century, and many Christians today fail to understand that they did indeed exist in the first century and reference to those gifts must remain within the context to whom they applied. These gifts were sorely needed at that time; during the infancy of the church, and before they had a completed revelation.
Over the years and with many hours of study on the subject I no longer hold the view I was first taught. I have no problem with those who hold this view so long as they defer from speaking in tongues, etc. However, I can not get that view which I was first taught to fit within the context it was written. It must be remembered that what was said most of the time in the New Testament concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit was said to people who either had spiritual gifts or who had the possibility of receiving them at the hands of an apostle. It would take to long to go over this subject in detail. For the time being I will try to answer, for those in class, any specific questions they might have on this subject. But since I don’t believe the present passage involves this topic I will address it more directly when the subject of the “gift of the Holy Spirit” or the “indwelling of the Spirit” is directly being taught.

- **Hobbs also said** …… “John 3:5 teaches the necessity of hearing the word of God with “an honest and good heart” and for one to be baptized in water. This new birth brings about entrance into the kingdom of God, salvation, and spiritual cleansing. The word “water” in John 3:5 refers to baptism. The word “spirit” refers to the word of God or to the Holy Spirit’s giving of the word of God to produce the new birth.

  - **This is my understanding as well.**
    - It should always be remembered …… that the primary work of the Holy Spirit in terms of the scheme of redemption for man is to provide revelation through inspired men and to confirm that revelation with miraculous signs and wonders.

9Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”
10Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?

- **The Pharisees** …… were more concerned about the praise of men than the praise of God.

  - **John 12:37–50** …… Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him; 38 it was that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” 39 Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said, 40 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.” 41 Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him. 42 Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the
synagogue: 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. 44 And Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And he who sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. 47 If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. 49 For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.”

- The Wycliffe Bible Commentary …… The perplexity of Nicodemus drew a gentle rebuke from Jesus. Could it be that a master (lit., the teacher) of Israel did not know these things? They were not new (Ezk 11:19). A spiritual kingdom and a spiritual life to match it are not foreign to the teaching of the OT.

- Ezekiel 11:19 – 20 …… 19 And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. RSV

- He may well have been …… much more concerned with the traditions of the elders than the actual Law and prophets themselves.

- Or it might be more like Barclay’s comment … “If a man does not wish to be reborn, he will deliberately misunderstand what rebirth means. If a man does not wish to be changed, he will deliberately shut his eyes and his mind and his heart to the power which can change him. In the last analysis what is the matter with so many of us is simply the fact that, when Jesus Christ comes with his offer of change us and re-create us, we more or less say: “No thank you: I am quite satisfied with myself as I am, and I don’t want to be changed.”

- This is what Jesus had to say about the Pharisees as teachers. Matthew 23:1:12 …… Then spake Jesus to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat: 3 all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. 4 Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. 5 But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries,
and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted. 1901 ASV

- **Johnson adds this comment** ..... “The question implies that Nicodemus was one of the doctors of the law. These made very arrogant claims of superior knowledge.”

If “Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

- **Jesus says**: Most assuredly. At this point Jesus is saying that there can be no doubt with respect to this doctrine of baptism and regeneration which he has just discussed.

- **We notice** ..... that the plural “we” is used here in reference to this remark.

- **Of all the explanations for this usage** ..... I believe the footnoted comment of Sir Edwin Hoskyns in The New International Commentary explains it best.

  - **He says** ..... “Jesus is no isolated person. There are, and have been, men who speak because they know, and bear witness because they have seen. There have been prophets; there is a man named John baptizing in the desert; and there are men who have left all and followed Jesus. These all say the same thing; and it is with their testimony that Nicodemus and his like must concern themselves.”

  - **We must always keep Psalms 119:160 in mind** ..... The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. RSV

  - **And Jesus says** ..... “you (ye) do not receive our witness.”

  - **This comment in the plural** ..... goes beyond Nicodemus and takes in much of the Jewish community at large and especially the Pharisees.
If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

- It seems to me ....... that the earthly things Jesus refers to in this verse must be referring back to the new birth that He has just finished talking to Nicodemus about.

  - The new birth process at that time ..... had been received by multitudes of ordinary men in the area around Judea and Jerusalem.

  - They were brought to faith ..... by the messages proclaimed by both John the Baptist and Jesus while the signs done by Jesus confirmed the word as being from God.

  - But the Pharisees did not believe or respond.

- As time went on and the situation worsened with many who would not hear .... Jesus explains why He began to speak in parables.

  - Matthew 13:10 – 17 ..... 10 Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” 11 He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 13 The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ 14 With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: ‘You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. 15 For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.’ 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. RSV
- Jesus used common earthly analogies and logic ..... to bring them to a point of faith and understanding but “they would not understand.”

- The logical conclusion to be made then ……. is the fact that they would not believe Jesus about things they should have readily understood, as other ordinary men of the day did, he then concludes how could they possibly understand Him when He tells them about heavenly things.

- Things like ……. atonement, the divine nature, heaven and hell, Incarnation, and the final judgment.

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

- In other words ……. no one but Jesus is qualified to reveal heavenly things because no one else has been in heaven and then descended to speak of what the Father willed.

- John 6:35 – 40 ….. 35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; 39 and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” RSV

- Concerning the statement ……. the Son of Man who is in heaven.

  o Many have a problem with this phrase because it seeming has Him in heaven while here on earth.

  o The phrase “who is in heaven” is omitted in some manuscripts.

  o The NIV renders the verse in this way ….. 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.
It then footnotes this phrase. (Some manuscripts Man, who is in heaven)

If the translation “the Son of Man who is in heaven” is correct …… it seems most probable that it is a comment from John, realizing that at the time of John’s writing, Jesus had returned to heaven.

This would then be like the comment John makes in 2:25 …… 23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; 24 but Jesus did not trust himself to them, 25 because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man. RSV

Other interpretations …… are offered by many commentators, that are certainly viable, but in light of the idea presented in this verse of ascending this seem the most likely explanation to me.

He uses the familiar term …… Son of Man.

Barnes makes this comment …… “The Son of man. Called thus from his being a man; from his interest in man; and as expressive of his regard for man. It is a favorite title which the Lord Jesus gives to himself.”

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.

Numbers 21:4 – 9 …… 4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way. 5 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 we loathe this worthless food.” 6 Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And 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. 8 And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. RSV
- Nicodemus would have been quite familiar with this story.
  - A story of sin and rebellion against God and Moses that had to be punished.
  - God sent fiery serpents that bit the people and many died.
- It is also a story of grace.
  - Moses intercedes for the people and God provides a remedy.
  - Moses is told to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole.
  - Moses makes a bronze serpent and set it on a pole.
- Anyone bit would look at the bronze serpent and live.
  - They believed and they obeyed the command to look at the bronze serpent. And they lived!
  - That same type of faith and obedience is still required today.

- Remember John 3:12 …… 12“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

- We now see the problem Jesus referred to in this verse.
  - As we look back at the Old Testament story …… and we relate it to Christ being lifted up on the cross in the New Testament ….. we know what it means. Hind sight is 20/20.
  - But this is very veiled to Nicodemus and to most of his day.
  - Nicodemus even had trouble with the earthly things about being “born again” …… that should have been reasonable easy for him as it was for many of the ordinary people of that day.
  - “Help my unbelief” is a justified cry …. but Nicodemus, and the nation in general, had been given every reason to trust in Jesus if they would just do it.
The “Son of Man” …… the one descended from heaven ….. the one who did all the signs ….. this is the one they needed to listen to and to trust.

- The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series" says ……. The verb lifted up has a dual meaning: to be crucified (John 8:28; 12:32–34) and to be glorified and exalted. In his Gospel, John points out that our Lord’s crucifixion was actually the means of His glorification (John 12:23ff). The cross was not the end of His glory; it was the means of His glory (Acts 2:33).

- **John 8:28** …… 28 So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. RSV

- **John 12:32-34** …… 32 and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” 33 He said this to show by what death he was to die. 34 The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?” RSV

- **John 12:23-26** …… 23 And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him. RSV

- **Acts 2:33** …… 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. RSV

- As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

- B.W. Johnson makes this summary comment ……. “As the bitten Israelites were healed by looking upon the brazen serpent lifted on high, so the world in sin is saved by looking to Jesus lifted up upon the cross.”

- This story is a big picture ……. that’s painted with a broad brush.

- Which means ……. it tells us a lot; but not in great detail.
Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. RSV

- It is also important to keep in mind that the parallels and analogies in these two events are many but it is also important to realize that there are far more dissimilarities than there are similarities.

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.

- I want to first mention that beginning with this verse many believe that John the apostle begins a sermon, as opposed to Jesus further answering the question of Nicodemus. “how can these things be.”

- A pretty good case can be made for either view.

- In the end it makes very little difference the message is still the same!

- Some place more merit on the words in red (the words of Jesus if correctly discerned by the translators) but this is completely unwarranted.

- All scripture is inspired (1Cor. 2:11-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21.)

- Coffman makes a good case for the continuing talk with Nicodemus. He says (For God so loved the world ...) "For" indicates that we do not have here a new section, but the continuation of the interview with Nicodemus. (So loved the world ...) is the burden of the entire corpus of divine revelation. Fittingly, this announcement of God's universal love was made to a representative of the narrowest and strictest sect in ancient Judaism, who taught that God's love was the special province of Israel, who were at that very time hoping for their long-awaited Messiah, who would, according to their views, restore the kingdom of Israel and judge the whole Gentile world with an overwhelming destruction. Jesus' refusal to conform to such an idea of the Messiah was a very conspicuous element in their rejection of him. Here, Christ hurled into the very teeth of the Sanhedrin the mind-blowing concept that God loved everyone on earth, the whole creation! It is no wonder that John never forgot such a confrontation as this; and no wonder that some
of the words in this interview became a part of his permanent vocabulary, appearing even in the writings of his old age, as in "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

- The New International Commentary adds this ….. “God loved “the world”. The Jew was ready enough to think of God as loving Israel, but no passage appears to be cited in which any Jewish writer maintains that God loved the world. It is a distinctively Christian idea that God’s love is wide enough to embrace all mankind. His love is not confined to any national group or any spiritual elite. It is a love which proceeds from the fact that He is love (1 John 4:8, 16). It is His nature to love. He loves men because He is the kind of God He is. John tells us that His love is shown in the gift of His Son.”

- Many scholars believe that John is talking in 3:16-21 and not recording the words of Jesus. This is some of the reasons given.

1. Jesus probably would have use the word “Father” instead of “God” in 3:16.

2. The tenses of the verbs in verses 16 and 19 – “loved” and “were” evidently mark an accomplished event. In verse 16 the death on the cross appears to be spoken of as a past event.

3. The word monogenes is used elsewhere of Christ only by John in 1:14; 1:18; 3:18; and 1 John 4:9.

4. The phrase “on the name of” is not found in the recorded words of Jesus.

5. The phrase “doeth the truth” occurs elsewhere only in 1 John 1:6.

- This verse is often called the Golden Text of the Bible.

- Guy N. Woods makes this statement that emphasizes the importance of many of the individual words used in this passage ….. “The blessings it offers are all superlative. In it we are told of the greatest giver (God), of the greatest gift (his only begotten Son), of the greatest measure (the world) and the greatest future blessing (eternal life). It is a refutation of Atheism (it begins with God); of agnosticism (it reveals God), of Calvinism (it extends God’s provisions to all the world, and not to an arbitrarily selected few), of Unitarianism (it establishes the deity of Jesus and shows him to be of the same nature as God), of Oneness Pentecostalism (it demonstrates God and Christ to be separate and distinct persons), of Universalism (it reveals that men will perish who refuse the way of escape) and the doctrine of denominational creeds which allege that Jesus died that God might love us whereas this teaches
that Jesus came to the earth and made salvation possible because God loved us. (Rom. 5:8, 9.)”

- Rom. 5:8-9 ….. 8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. RSV

- The biggest problem many people have with this verse, it seems to me, is:

  1. All other scripture ….. that touches on the subject of salvation, in light of eternal life, are completely disregarded.

  2. The verse is viewed by many ….. based on what is not being mentioned in the verse. Such things as repentance, baptism in water, etc.

- Again ….. it is important to remember Psalms 119:160 ….. 160 The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. RSV

- No single verse can tell it all! We must study the whole Bible.

  - The apostle Paul said ….. Acts 20:27 ….. 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. RSV

- Next, we want to single out several words in this verse that are often misunderstood ….. so we can both understand and teach this verse more correctly.

- First, let’s look at the word ….. “gave.”

  - God so loved that --- “He gave.”

  - This points to the cross.

  - He gave ….. His only begotten, His unique, His only-one-of-a-kind Son to die for us.

  - Love gives ….. 2 Cor. 9:15 ….. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! RSV

  - As with all gifts ….. it can be received or rejected.

    - The blood bought gift of salvation ….. is offered to all people.
- Offered to all *(whoever)* ..... that was the unbelievably difficult thing for Nicodemus to understand about the necessity of being “born again or anew” as it was for most all Jews at that time.

- Eph 2:13-17 ..... 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.  

- But it is a gift that must be ..... *received, accepted and appropriated.*

- No one is saved automatically ..... *because Jesus died for them.*

- Eph. 1:7 ..... 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace  

- 1Pet. 1:18-19 ..... 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.  

- Col. 1:19-23 ..... 19 For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreprouachable before him, 23 provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.  

RSV
Gifts can be conditional.

- This is easy to see in the example of Jericho where God gave them the gift of the city .... but only after certain conditions were met.

  - Joshua 6:2 ....... 2 And the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given into your hand Jericho, with its king and mighty men of valor. RSV

  - But Hebrews 11:30 says ....... 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. RSV

  - The conditions were met and the gift of the city was given to them ....... but in no way could anyone even imagine that the gift was earned or deserved.

Salvation is a free gift ....... we cannot earn it, deserve it, or work for it.

- But ....... we can have an obedient faith that receives and appropriates the gift of salvation as God directs.

  - Rom. 3:23-25 ....... 23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. RSV

  - We become free from sin when we become obedient to the Lord in being baptized for the remission of our sins ....... this is the defining or consummating act of conversion.

    - Rom. 6:3-4 ....... 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. RSV

    - Rom. 6:17-18 ....... 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. RSV

    - Col. 2:6 ....... 6 As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. RSV
Next we want to look at the phrase "should not perish."

Coffman says "The so-called translations that read this place "shall not perish" are incorrect."

The question is does it really make any difference which way it's translated ... shall or should?

The answer is It makes a world of difference!

Many today believe that all one must do to be saved is just mentally believe.

That is to say one act of faith in Jesus Christ culminates in eternal life.

In other words they believe in "justification by faith alone" and that believing is "the condition of eternal life."

Some even go on to say God does not require one to repent to receive eternal life; He requires faith alone in Christ alone, period.

And many of those same people believe that once that faith is declared nothing can sever his relationship with God.

Consequently we then have the false doctrine of Once saved always saved!

Most of these groups use what is commonly referred to as "The Sinners Prayer" which may or may not talk about repentance, etc. The one thing that is consistent is the belief that one is saved at the point of uttering this prayer.

I just pulled this example randomly off the internet:

The "Sinner's Prayer" is a term that describes the words spoken by a person when he or she has recognized their sin and their need for a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It goes something like this:

"Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and
help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ
died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears
my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and
reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy
Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my
life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”

If you decided to repent of your sins and receive Christ today, welcome to God's
family. Now, as a way to grow closer to Him, the Bible tells us to follow up on our
commitment.

- Get baptized as commanded by Christ.
- Tell someone else about your new faith in Christ.
- Spend time with God each day. It does not have to be a long period of time.
  Just develop the daily habit of praying to Him and reading His Word. Ask
  God to increase your faith and your understanding of the Bible.
- Seek fellowship with other followers of Jesus. Develop a group of believing
  friends to answer your questions and support you.
- Find a local church where you can worship God.

- The inaccurate translation ….. “shall not perish” gives the
  idea that belief alone is sufficient for salvation.

  Truth”, pg. 214 ….. takes the time to explain why the
  translation “shall not perish” is incorrect.

- He says ….. “The words “should not perish” is the correct
  translation of me apoletai. This Greek verb is in the subjunctive
  mood. The subjunctive mood is the mood of contingency and
  possibility – not actuality! It is not actual or fact that one will believe.
  If one does continue to believe, he has eternal life. By using the
  subjunctive mood, John, through the Holy Spirit, is suggesting the
  possibility that one might perish. John 3:16 is definitely not teaching
  “Once Saved Always Saved.”

- He goes on to say ….. that the words “perish” and
  “have” are also in the subjunctive mood of
  contingency.

- In other words ….. if we continue to believe, we
  will have eternal life. If we do not continue to
  believe, we will perish.

- Which way we go depends on us.
John 5:28-29 says it this way ……

28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. RSV

- **Eternal life is our goal** ……it is everlasting communion with God and all the marvelous promises that involves.

- A state of **glory** (Rom. 2:10; 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17), receiving **“the crown of life”** (Rev. 2:10; James 1:12), receiving a **great reward** (Matt. 5:12; Heb. 10:35-36, 11:5), **rest** (Heb. 12:11, and **happiness** (Matt. 25:21).

17“**For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.** 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.**

- **Salvation was the central mission of Jesus.**

- **Luke 19:10** ……

10 For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” RSV

- **1 Tim. 2:1-5** ……

1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. 3 This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, RSV

- **2 Pet. 3:9** ……

9 The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. RSV

- “**The phrase** …… **the world through Him might be saved.** ……” is the **key to understanding** that salvation in Christ is offered to all men if they **continue to believe** in and **continue to obey Him in faith.**

- **Salvation is a choice** …… and the “**paradox**” of other verses that tell us that Jesus **“did come”** into the world **“for judgment”** is the fact that “**salvation is a two sided coin.”**
- The fact of salvation for all who believe implies judgment on all who do not.

- John 5:22-24 ..... 22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. RSV

- John 12:48 ..... 48 He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. RSV

- Again, the phrase ....... only begotten Son of God ....... tells us of the unique relationship between the Father and the Son and that this is where our hope lies.

- Acts 4:1 ..... 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” RSV

- Barclay makes the following comments ....... that gives both additional insight into this passage and adds emphasis to the previous verses concerning judgment:

- “Once an architect came to Plato and offered for a certain sum of money to build him a house into none of whose rooms it would be possible to see. Plato said: “I will give you double the money to build a house into whose every room everyone can see.” It is only the evil-doer who does not wish to see himself and who does not wish anyone else to see him. Such a man will inevitably hate Jesus Christ, for Christ will show him what he is and that is the last thing he wants to see. It is the concealing darkness that he loves and not the revealing light.

   By this 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.”
- It is all too easy to present an arrogant attitude about salvation no matter what your views are.

- **Some teachings** date back to the restoration period of Luther and Calvin and they have had far-reaching effects. The two doctrinal errors that have been the most persistent are “original sin” and “faith only.”

- There is probably no greater division of thought going on today than that presented by what Prentice Meador’s called “The Great Debate: Believer’s Baptism or The Sinner’s Prayer?”

- **Having heard his presentation on the subject** the one thing I remember most was an attitude that said the “Sinners Prayer” was a good starting place. Instead of being a point of contention he viewed it as an opportunity to present the Gospel’s scheme of redemption that includes Believer’s Baptism, and the necessity of it, more fully. This presentation is something that can be gone over with anyone and it gives them an opportunity to ponder over and consider “Believer’s Baptism” in God’s plan of salvation for man.

- Our attitude should never be how little can I do and get by with it. **It should always be what else do I need to do.**

- **Invite them to take a close look at the Bible conversion examples in the New Testament and judge for yourself what is needed. The question comes down to what do you want to leave out?” Why?**

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“The Great Debate: Believer’s Baptism or The Sinner’s Prayer?”
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I. **Baptism Is A Passive Act.**

A. Baptism is not something you do, but is something thing that is done to you by God.

B. We each know the feelings of guilt, sin, and despair.
C. But God has graciously acted. – “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3).

- Baptism begins with God’s love (Eph. 2:1-5).
- His grace takes us to Christ’s death.
- A person is not doing anything to save himself, but is responding to the grace where God is doing something.

D. God is at work in baptism. Baptism is the place of God’s powerful action.

II. Baptism Is A Symbolic Act.

A. A “sign” points to something while a “symbol” participates in the reality to which it points (American flag, Passover, Lord’s Supper).

B. Baptism is a symbol of God’s recreation in us.

- We die, lay alongside Christ, and are raised as new spiritual beings (Rom. 6:3-5).
- So baptism imitates the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus.

C. Baptism is a symbol of spiritual new birth (John 3:3-6)

III. Baptism Is A Cleansing Act.

A. “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified” (1 Cor. 6:11)

B. But how are our sins forgiven?

- Heb. 9:14 – The blood of Christ cleanses us.
- 1Pet. 3:21 – Baptism saves us by contacting the blood.

C. God cleanses us in baptism, and internal cleansing of sin and guilt (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16).

IV. Baptism Is A Fellowship Act.

A. The end of baptism is fellowship, relationship with Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27).

B. N.T. reveals that salvation is in Christ (Rom. 3:24), is in Christ (Rom. 8:1).
C. Prof. F.F. Bruce states, “the idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the N.T.”

V. Baptism Is A Community Act.

A. We declare ourselves openly and publicly that Jesus is Lord which is what we must know.

B. Campbell, Lipscomb, McGarvey all taught that baptism to join a church was not scriptural and that if a person believed in Christ, repented of sins, desired to obey God, was immersed, that person was added to the church. This is a non-sectarian, non-denominational view of membership.

C. Baptism signifies coming into the body/community of Christ (1Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41).

“It is always a thrill to see a person come forth from baptism ….. Baptism is the defining moment.” – Helen Young

- We need to always present an attitude ……. that shows that we care about people’s souls and about rightly dividing God’s word of truth and not about simply winning an argument for arguments sake. That is always self defeating. Everyone loses.

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

- After these things ……. points back to the events of the Passover week in Jerusalem and the meeting with Nicodemus.

- They leave Jerusalem ….. and go into the country districts of Judea of which Jerusalem was the capitol.

- Coffman sheds light on the Judaean ministry of Jesus …… he says …….”This Gospel gives the Judaean ministry of Christ, almost totally omitted by the synoptics. The Spirit of God directed the apostles in the choice of the material they included. Jesus had definitely stressed the fact that the Gospel should first be offered to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Luke 24:27; Acts 1:8); and "to the Jew first" became a slogan of the missionary work of Paul, and presumably of all the apostles. How fitting, therefore, that the Lord himself should have carried his great message first to the Jews as revealed in this Gospel,
and as we should not have known if only the synoptics existed. Furthermore, this Judaean ministry explains a number of statements in the synoptics which, in the light of this Gospel, are clear references to the Judaean ministry. Thus, Jesus said in Matthew that he had "often" attempted to gather the citizens of Jerusalem unto himself (Matt. 23:37). See Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3if, and Luke 13:34,35, all of which are trace references to the great Judaean ministry of Jesus which occurred before John the Baptist was cast into prison, a fact John stressed, thus making it very early in the Lord's ministry. This Judaean part of it lasted from May until December.”

- He then says …… there He remained with them and baptized.

- This is the first indication we have …… that Jesus was ever involved in baptizing.

- And shortly we will be told …… that He did it through his disciples

  - Jn. 4:1-2 …… ¹ Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples) RSV

- The question naturally arises …… What kind of baptism was Jesus involved with at this time?

  - It seems most probable …… that it was simply a continuation of the “baptism of repentance” that was typical of John the Baptist.

    - This “baptism of repentance” …… was God’s preparatory act for the kingdom at this point in time.

  - We know that the early preaching of Jesus …… was in the same vein as that of John.

    - Matthew 4:17 …… ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” RSV

  - It obvious could not have been Christian baptism …… because Christ had not yet died.

²³Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.
- **Some say** ……. that these now *extinct cities* appears to have been somewhere in the Jordan Plain, not far from Jericho, near the fords of Jordan. (The New International Commentary and Hendriksen’s New Testament Commentary).

- **B.W. Johnson in the People’s Commentary makes this comment** ……. *And John was baptizing in Ænon near Salim.* The site was first identified by Lieut. Conder, of the British Palestine Exploration. He found a village of Ainun near another named Salim, not far from the Jordan, northeast of Samaria, with, as he says (Tent Work, p. 92), "the two requisites for the scene of baptism of a large multitude;--an open space and abundance of water." Prof. McGarvey, who visited it, says: "Pools, well suited for baptizing are abundant." **Because there was much water there.** This explains, not why John preached at Ænon, but why he baptized there. "Much water" was essential to baptism in New Testament times.

- **Obviously** ……. more important than the place is the much water mentioned.

- **Wood’s makes this statement in the Gospel Advocate Commentary on John** ……. “The place was in Aenon, “near to Salim,” located in a lovely valley one mile wide and three miles long where springs flow copiously even in the hottest, driest part of summer and with ample room for the large crowds to gather to hear his messages. It is said that the reason John chose this place to baptize was because “there was much water there.” This evidences the fact that “much water” is essential to the act which John performed. Here is incidental mention of that which shows that baptism must have been by immersion since “much water” is not needed for either sprinkling or pouring. John came to this place because it suited his purpose which was to baptize – an act requiring “much water.” No such comment would have been offered by the sacred historian if John’s act of baptizing had been any other than immersion. The word *baptize* means to immerse, submerge, dip, and is so defined by all reliable lexicons.”

- **Even John Calvin’s comments are telling** (he giveth and he taketh away, so to speak)…… comment on verse 22 he says ……. From these words, we may infer that John and Christ administered baptism by plunging the whole body beneath the water; though we ought not to give ourselves any great uneasiness about the outward rite, provided that it agree with the spiritual truth, and with the Lord’s appointment and rule. So far as we are able to conjecture, the; vicinity of those places caused various reports to be circulated, and many discussions to arise, about the Law, about the worship of God, and about the condition of the Church, in consequence of two persons who administered baptism having arisen at the same time. For when the Evangelist says that *Christ baptized*, I refer this to the commencement of his ministry; namely, that he then began to exercise publicly the office which was appointed to
him by the Father. And though Christ did this by his disciples, yet he is here
named as the Author of the baptism, without mentioning his ministers, who did
nothing but in his name and by his command. On this subject, we shall have
something more to say in the beginning of the next Chapter. (Calvin, J. (1998).
Calvin's Commentaries: John (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's
Commentaries (Jn 3:22). Albany, OR: Ages Software.)

24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

  commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New
  Testaments …… John not yet cast into prison—Hence it is plain that our
  Lord’s ministry did not commence with the imprisonment of John, though, but for
  this, we should have drawn that inference from Mt 4:12 and Mark’s (Mk 1:14)
  express statement.

  - Mt. 4:11-17 …… Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and
    ministered to him.
  12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee;
  and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Caperna-um by the sea, in the territory
  of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be
  fulfilled: 15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across
  the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 the people who sat in darkness
  have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
  light has dawned.” 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for
  the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”  RSV

  - Mark 1:13-4 …… And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by
    Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.
  14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of
    God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
    repent, and believe in the gospel.”  RSV

- The New Testament Commentary of John by Hendrickson
  makes this comment of explanation …… “Before proceeding with his
  narrative the author solves a problem. The reader might raise the objection, “How
  was it possible for John to be engaged in the work of baptizing at this time? Is it not
  true that immediately after our Lord’s temptation the Baptist had been cast into
  prison?” The author senses that some might misinterpret Matt. 4:11, 12 in that sense.
  Hence, evidently taking for granted that believers in Asia Minor at this relatively late
date had read the earlier Gospels, the author corrects a possible misunderstanding,
and shows that between Matt. 4:11 and 4:12 (or between Mark 1:13 and 1:14; or
between Luke 4:13 and 4:14; ie., between Christ’s temptation and the arrest of John
the Baptist) there was a considerable period of time during which Jesus and John
were engaged in a parallel ministry. It is thus that we explain the statement, For
John had not yet been imprisoned.”

43
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!”

- Verse 25 in the RSV reads ….. 25 Now a discussion arose between John’s disciples and a Jew over purifying.

- Most likely ….. this man was a Pharisee and not a follower of John or Jesus.

- The matter of purification ….. was important to all Jews, because under the OT Law it was necessary for them to keep themselves ceremonially clean in order to please and serve God, but it was made a heavy burden by the Pharisees adding so many extra traditions to the Law. (Mark 7:1-3)

- The question ask by this Jew must have been something along this line ….. “where does this dipping in water fit into the Jewish purification scheme and how does this all relate to John and Jesus?”

- Some believe ….. that this man’s interest in the dispute was to simply cause perplexity and discord.

- John’s disciples then come to him ….. with a question that basically says that they did not fully understand the relationship of John to Jesus even though John was quite clear about it from the beginning of his ministry.

- John 1:29-30 ….. 29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.’ ” RSV

- A number of remarks by different commentators call our attention to the root of the problem.

- The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures ….. John’s disciples may have been angry and jealous. (They were interested in John’s movement and were not committed to Jesus.) They complained that Jesus, of whom John had testified, had now captured the nation’s attention. They longed for the former days when everyone went to hear John (Mark 1:5).
Mark 1:4-5 (the former days)…… 4 John the baptizer appeared in
the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of
sins. 5 And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the
people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan,
confessing their sins. RSV

comprising the entire 'BE' series" -- Without realizing it, John’s
disciples were putting him into a situation of competing against the Lord
Jesus! “All men come to Him!” (John 3:26) sounds like a wail of despair. It is
interesting to note that four of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem
of comparison and competition: Moses (Num. 11:26–30), John the Baptist
often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics!

Numbers 11:26-30 (Moses)…… 26 Now two men remained in the
camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested
upon them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to
the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man ran and
told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28 And
Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said,
“My lord Moses, forbid them.” 29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous
for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the
LORD would put his spirit upon them!” 30 And Moses and the elders of
Israel returned to the camp. RSV

Guy N. Wood’s sums it up this way …… “They recalled John’s
announcement of Jesus (John 1:29), and it now seemed to them that he who
owed this public introduction to John was on the verge of surpassing him.
This both perplexed and worried them and may have made them jealous.
They said, in effect, “The people are leaving you and listening to him whom
you baptized and introduced to the world.”

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.’

Once again …… we see John’s greatness here.

John always knew his mission and purpose …… and he
fulfilled it completely with all joy.
- **Even before his birth ……. John the Baptist rejoiced in the Lord**

  - **Luke 1:44 …….** 44 For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. **RSV**

  - **Luke 1:11-17 …….** 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” **NKJV**

  - **Matthew Chapter 3 (at the beginning of his ministry) …….** 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” 4 Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 10 ‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 11 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’” 12 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 13 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 14 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.” Then he consented. 15 And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; 16 and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” **RSV**

- **At this time he saw his work coming to a close ……. and he rejoiced in it as will be illustrated by the story of the friend of the bridegroom.**
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.

- Again …… John knew who he was, and he knew exactly what his mission was, even though some of his disciples were evidently misguided by their zeal and loyalty to him.

- William Barclay does a good job of giving us some insight into this position of the “the friend of bridegroom.” He says …… “The friend of the bridegroom, the shoshen, had a unique place at a Jewish wedding. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom; he arranged the wedding; he took out the invitations; he presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. And he had one special duty. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and to let no false lover in. He would open the door only when in the dark he heard the bridegroom’s voice and recognized it. When he heard the bridegroom’s voice he let him in and went away rejoicing, for his task was completed and the lovers were together. He did not grudge the bridegroom the bride. He knew that his only task had been to bring bride and bridegroom together. And when that task was done he willingly and gladly faded out of the center of the picture.

John’s task had been to bring Israel and Jesus together; to arrange the marriage between Christ the bridegroom and Israel the bride. That task completed he was happy to fade into obscurity for his work was done. It was not with envy that he said that Jesus must increase and he must decrease; it was with joy. It may be that sometimes we would do well to remember that it is not to ourselves we must try to attach people; it is to Jesus Christ. It is not for ourselves we seek the loyalty of men; it is for him.”

- John did the heaven-prescribed work assigned to him …… and that was enough for him.

- Every man has his work and sphere appointed him from above. Even Christ Himself came under this law:

- Hebrews 5:1 …… 1 For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. 4 And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,
“Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee”; as he says also in another place, “Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. RSV

- The following is a paraphrased rendition of this account concerning the work of John:

  - Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments.* “I do my heaven-prescribed work, and that is enough for me. Would you have me mount into my Master’s place? Said I not unto you, I am not the Christ? The Bride is not mine, why should the people stay with me?? Mine it is to point the burdened to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, to tell them there is Balm in Gilead, and a Physician there. And shall I grudge to see them, in obedience to the call, flying as a cloud, and as doves to their windows? Whose is the Bride but the Bridegroom’s? Enough for me to be the Bridegroom’s friend, sent by Him to negotiate the match, privileged to bring together the Saviour and those He is come to seek and to save, and rejoicing with joy unspeakable if I may but ‘stand and hear the Bridegroom’s voice,’ witnessing the blessed espousals. Say ye, then, they go from me to Him? Ye bring me glad tidings of great joy. He must increase, but I must decrease; this, my joy, therefore is fulfilled.”

- Coffman speaks correctly in context as he talks about “the bride” …… “In the New Testament, the church is called the bride of Christ; but this verse does not mean that the church was, at that time, established and that Jesus had possession of it. "The bride" here has reference to the spiritual Israel of God, that portion of the external Israel which were in fact the spiritual seed of Abraham. Although the spiritual Israel had been commingled with secular Israel throughout history to that time, the separation was then being made through the instrumentality of the baptism preached by John, a separation that would become final at Pentecost and afterward. As Westcott said, "The Baptist had fulfilled his office in preparing and bringing the representatives of the spiritual Israel -- the new divine Bride -- to Christ the Bridegroom."
Spiritual Israel and secular Israel were separated ….. this is the subject of Roman’s chapters nine, ten and eleven.

He goes on to say ….. “The image of the bride and the bridegroom is found often in the prophetical books of the Old Testament, where it was invariably used to describe the relationship between God and his people Israel (Hosea 2:19; Ezek. 16; Mal. 2:11, etc.). Thus, it should be concluded that John the Baptist received the metaphor from the Old Testament. It was his before it became the apostle's. Thus, the author of John did not impute his own words here, but gave an accurate account of what was truly said.”

Wood’s makes an interesting comment on verse 30 (He must increase, but I must decrease)…… “The parallel ministries of Jesus and John, both with the design of baptizing multitudes preparatory to the coming kingdom, existed as a transitional device, and without any heavenly intention of promulgating two distinct systems. In God’s providence, John would shortly be cast into prison and lose his life to the sword of Herod, and event that would make it easier for John’s disciples to follow Christ.”

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.

Jesus was not simply called from heaven ….. or empowered by heaven ….. He came from heaven.

It was this claim that the Jews disputed ….. because they knew it was His claim that He was God

John 6:38-42 ….. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; 39 and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” 41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” 42 They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

RSV

John the Baptist was indeed earthly ….. he certainly was not “from above” ….. nor did he claim to be.

No earthly messenger of God came “from above.” Only Jesus Christ can make that claim and prove it.
- A sharp contrast is made between Jesus and John the Baptist.

- Since Jesus came from heaven …… He represents the Father …… to reject His witness is to reject the Father.

- John 5:23 …… 23 that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. RSV

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.

- He shares what He has seen and heard from the Father.

- John 8:34-38 …… 34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you. 38 I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.” RSV

- If His teachings are obeyed and His Word put into practice we will know and experience its power.

- John 7:16-17 …… “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; 17 if any man’s will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. RSV

- Verse 33 …… Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, ‘that God is true. ESV

- “Certified” or “sets his seal” …… is to receive the Lord’s testimony as true.

- Wood’s says …… “In that day, one’s seal on a document was one’s attestation that the document was valid and true. One cannot believe in Christ without believing in the Father; and conversely, it is not possible to believe in God without believing in Christ.”

34“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

- The Gospel Advocate Commentary gives as complete an explanation of this verse as I can find:
“For,” introduces the reason for the conclusion drawn in the preceding verse. The Father sent the Son into the world; the Son speaks the words of the Father; therefore, to believe the Son is to believe the Father. The reason the Son is able to speak fully, accurately and authoritatively of the Father is that God did not give the Spirit by measure to him. The power which he exercised, by the Spirit, to speak of heavenly things is limitless and unmeasured. Anything given by measure is limited to the measure by which it is determined. Christ’s power by the Spirit were unmeasured, hence without limitation. The context requires that the “he” of the clause, “for he giveth not the Spirit by measure,” to be understood of God, the Father; and he to whom the Spirit was not given by measure of Christ. The King James’ Version at this point has a clearer and more accurate rendering: “God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”

The implication is clear that God did give the Spirit “by measure” to others. The apostles and the house of Cornelius (Acts 2:1ff; 10:1ff), received the baptismal measure of the Spirit; the apostles, through laying on of hands, could and did impart to others a lesser, though miraculous, gift (Acts 8:16ff). Only Christ had the Spirit “without measure”, following the events at the house of Cornelius in A.D. 41, the baptism of the Spirit was not again administered (there is “one” baptism thenceforth, which is in water, Eph. 4:4-6), and the power to impart the Spirit by imposition of hands ended with the apostles. The guidance of the Spirit is today enjoyed by means of the teaching which the Spirit did through inspired men and caused to be recorded in the scripture. By it we are made complete, and completely supplied unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:17, 18.) It is vitally important to a proper understanding of measures of the Spirit to keep in mind that the varying measures were measured amounts of power which the Spirit exercised through men and not varying amounts of Spirit.”

“**The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.**

- **Wiersbe, W. W.** (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"* -- We usually think of God’s love for a lost world (John 3:16), but John reminds us of the Father’s love for His Son. Jesus is the Father’s “beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). Because the Father loves the Son, He has given Him all things, and He shows Him all things (John 5:20). It is a love that can hold nothing back. Therefore, when we receive His witness, we share in His love and His wealth. To reject Christ’s witness is to sin against love and light. No wonder our Lord wept over the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37–39). They had rejected His witness—both His messages and His miracles—and their rejection led to judgment.
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.”

- **The RSV reads** ....... 36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

- **He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life.** The New Testament represents everlasting life as a present possession obtained by belief.

- **But he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life.** In the second clause of this verse "obeyeth" stands in contrast with "believeth" in the first clause.

- **No mental assent** ....... *however strong*, is reckoned by the Scriptures as faith unless it results in obedience.

  - **James 2:20** ....... 20 Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren?  **RSV**

  - **Romans 1:5** ....... 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,  **RSV**

- **But the wrath of God abideth on him.** "Wrath of God" is a strong phrase, and is not to be lightly explained away. The unconverted sinner rests under this wrath. His study should be not only to avert a sentence to be pronounced at some future day, but to be freed from one already resting upon him. This verse shows conclusively that Christ's atoning work had its divine as well as its human side; that God had to be propitiated as truly as man had to be reconciled. The Baptist had already repeatedly warned the Jewish people of the wrath to come if they rejected the Messiah, and in this, his last recorded utterance, he boldly reiterates that warning.  **(The Fourfold Gospel)**

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