

# John 3 Commentary

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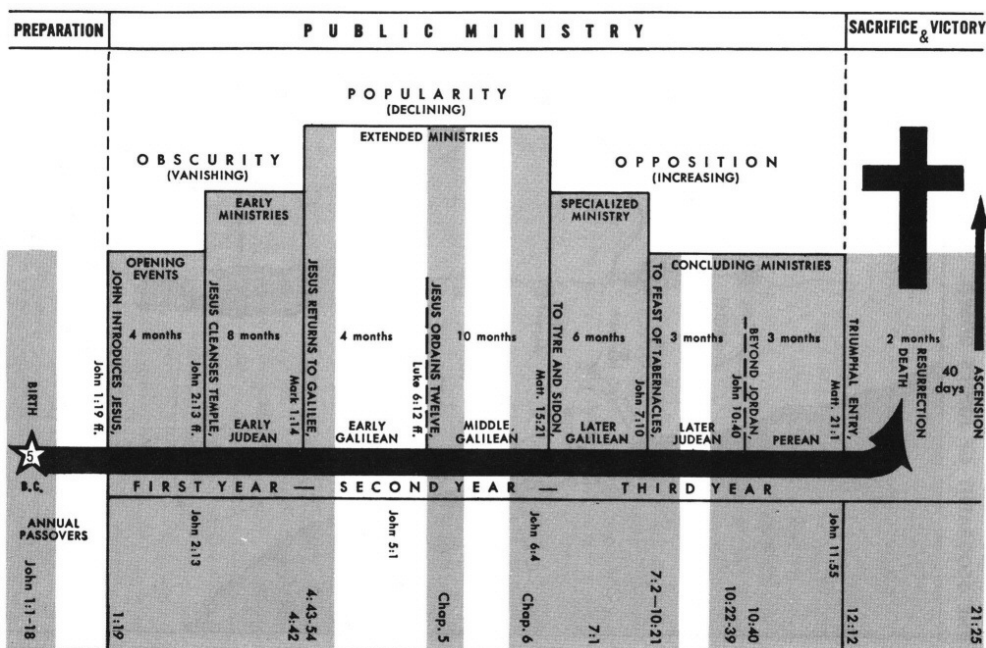
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## COMPARING 3 ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

	NICODEMUS	SAMARITAN WOMAN	ROYAL OFFICIAL
PLACE	Jerusalem	Samaria	Cana
TIME	Night	Noon	Not stated
OCCASION	Planned Visit	By Chance (providence)	An Urgent Visit
CONTENT	Theological	Practical	Practical
INITIATOR	Nicodemus	Jesus	Royal Official
ETHNICITY	Jew	Samaritan	Jew (some think Roman)
SOCIAL STATUS	Respected, Pharisee, Teacher	Despised woman (Immoral)	Respected Official
SEX	Male	Female	Male
NEED	Seeking the Kingdom	Seeking Water	Seeking Healing
FORM	Nicodemus faded out	Dialogue continued to end	Dialogue then obedience
RESULT	Not mentioned	Converted and witnessed and others converted	Converted along with his whole household
OUR LORD'S APPROACH	Explained Born Again	Explained Living Water	Showed power over disease

**These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. -- John 20:31**

The conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21)

The way to life stated (John 3:1-15)

The way to life explained (John 3:16-21)

His disclosure in Judea (John 3:22-36)

The ministry of Christ (John 3:22)

The ministry of John (John 3:23-36)

The setting (John 3:23-24)

The testimony of John (John 3:25-30)

The explanation of John (John 3:31-36) (Hannah's Bible Outlines)

**John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;**

NET John 3:1 Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling

council,

GNT John 3:1 ν δ νθρωπος κ τ ν Φαρισα ων, Νικ δημος νομα α τ , ρχων τ ν ουδα ων·

NLT John 3:1 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee.

KJV John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

ESV John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

NIV John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

ASV John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

CSB John 3:1 There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

NKJ John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

NRS John 3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

YLT John 3:1 And there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus his name, a ruler of the Jews,

NAB John 3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

NJB John 3:1 There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews,

GWN John 3:1 Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish council.

BBE John 3:1 Now there was among the Pharisees a man named Nicodemus, who was one of the rulers of the Jews.

- **of the Pharisees.** Jn 3:10. Jn 1:24.
- **Nicodemus** Jn 3:4, 9. Jn 7:50. Jn 19:39. Jn 7:47-49
- **ruler.** Jn 7:26, Jn 7:48, 12:42. Lk 18:18. Lk 24:20.
- **the Jews.** Jn 5:10.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NICODEMUS A PERSUADABLE PHARISEE

[Persuadable](#) means open to persuasion, able to be urged, or prevailed upon successfully. Capable of being persuaded, open to being caused to believe or be convinced. To [persuade](#) means to move by argument, entreaty, or expostulation to a belief, position, or course of action.

This nocturnal dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus is described in John 3:1-21, although after John 3:9 Nicodemus fades into the background. Presumably he heard the extended teaching by Jesus in John 3:10-21. But before we begin recall the immediate context in Jn 2:23, 24+ "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, **many believed in His name**, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, **was not entrusting Himself to them**, for He knew all men." So without a break (there were no chapter breaks in the original text) the previous passage [segues](#) to Nicodemus. And even as Jews had observed Jesus' signs (Jn 2:23+), Nicodemus' opens with a statement that "no one can do these **signs** that You do unless God is with him." (Jn 3:2) A further connection with John 2:23-25+ and the fact that Jesus "**knew what was in man**" (Jn 2:25+) is the fact that Jesus now demonstrates that He knows what is in the heart of Nicodemus. Jesus could see beneath Nicodemus' religious veneer and knew that Nicodemus' religion could not save him, but that he needed the new birth. As the Gospel of John unfolds Nicodemus' story, there is good evidence that Nicodemus' superficial, non-saving belief became saving belief. In Jn 7:50-52 he stood up for Jesus and was rebuffed by his contemporaries. In John 19:39-40 Nicodemus clearly identified himself with Jesus indicating that he now had genuine, saving faith. How fascinating that in John's last mention of Nicodemus, he identifies him as the one "**who had first come to Him by night.**" One cannot help but believe that there is play on words for Nicodemus' spiritual night in John 3 had been turned by the Spirit toward belief in the "**Light of life**" (Jn 8:12)! Amazing grace indeed!

**J C Ryle** - THE conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, which begins with these verses, is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible. Nowhere else do we find stronger statements about those two mighty subjects, the new birth, and salvation by faith in the Son of God. The servant of Christ will do well to make himself thoroughly acquainted with this chapter. A man may be ignorant of many things in religion, and yet be saved. But to be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter, is to be in the broad way which leadeth to destruction.

**John MacArthur**- The placing of the chapter break here is unfortunate, since the story of Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus is logically tied to the previous section (Jn 2:23–25).....John 2:23–25 described Jesus' refusal to accept shallow, sign-based faith, since in His omniscience, He understood the people's hearts. The story of Nicodemus is a case in point, since Nicodemus himself was one of those superficial believers whose heart He read like an open book. Instead of affirming his profession, the Lord refused to accept Nicodemus's faith, which was solely based on the signs he had witnessed (v. 2). Jesus pointed him to the life-transforming nature of true saving faith. (See [John Commentary](#))

**D A Carson** introduces this chapter noting that "The one who 'knew all men', who 'did not need man's testimony about man' (2:24–25), now enters into a number of conversations in which he instantly gets to the heart of individuals with highly diverse backgrounds and needs—Nicodemus (3:1–15), the Samaritan woman (4:1–26), the Gentile official (4:43–53), the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1–15), and more." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 184)

**Matthew Henry** - We found, in the close of the foregoing chapter, that few were brought to Christ at Jerusalem; yet here was one, a considerable one. It is worthwhile to go a great way for the salvation though but of one soul....Not many mighty and noble are called (1 Cor 1:26-29); yet some are, and here was one.

**Now** (de) is a conjunction that often marks a contrast (adversative) but in this context (as often in John) it is more "explanatory and transitional, not adversative." (Robertson) There is no record that the disciples are present at the nic at night encounter, but we cannot be dogmatic.

**Robertson** adds that "**Nicodemus** is an instance of Christ's knowledge of men (John 2:25+) and of one to whom he did trust himself unlike those in John 2:24+. As a Pharisee "he belonged to that party which with all its bigotry contained a salt of true patriotism and could rear such cultured and high-toned men as Gamaliel and Paul" (Marcus Dods). (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

Nicodemus was religious (Jn 3:1), respected (Jn 3:1, 10), restless (Jn 3:2) and reluctant (Jn 3:4, 9).

**There was a man of the Pharisees - Man** is interesting because in a very real sense Nicodemus comes as a representative of man (and woman) every born! He belonged to this religious group, the most influential of the three major Jewish sects (cf [Sadducees](#) and [Essenes](#)). We first read about the Pharisees in the second century B.C. (see [Josephus Antiquities 13.10.5–6](#)). The Pharisees were "supernaturalists" for they believed in the resurrection, the existence of angels and demons (Lk 20:27+; Acts 23:6–9+), predestination, free will, and the validity of both the written and the oral law. Politically Pharisees were generally more conservative than the Sadducees, but on the other hand religiously they were more liberal due to their acceptance of the oral law. Sadly they were supernaturalistic [hypocrites](#) for they were "like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Mt 23:27) So Nicodemus was a learned man in contrast to most of Christ's followers who were **unlearned and ignorant men** (cf Acts 4:13KJV+)! As **Matthew Henry** says "The principles of the Pharisees, and the peculiarities of their sect, were directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity; yet there were some in whom even those high thoughts were cast down and brought into obedience to Christ (e.g., Nicodemus). **The grace of Christ is able to subdue the greatest opposition.** (PRAISE GOD!)"

Being religious is never enough!

Nicodemus comes to Jesus because, despite all his religious activity, there is still an aching void in his heart. Could it be that Jesus himself can fill that void?

**Leon Morris** says that as a **Pharisee** "Nicodemus would have stressed the careful observance of the Law and the traditions of the elders. For the loyal Pharisee this was the way of salvation. John uses this conversation to show that all such views are wide of the mark. Not a devout regard for the Law, not even a revised presentation of Judaism is required, but a radical rebirth. The demand is repeated three times (Jn 3:3, 5, 7). Nicodemus and all his tribe of lawdoers are left with not the slightest doubt but that what is asked of anyone is not more law, but the power of God within that person to remake him or her completely. In its own way this chapter does away with "works of the law" every bit as thoroughly as anything in Paul." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John page 208](#))

**Pharisees** (5330)([pharisaios](#)) transliterated from the Hebrew **parash** (06567 - to separate) from Aramaic word **peras** (06537) ("Peres" in Da 5:28+), signifying to separate, owing to a different manner of life from that of the general public. After the resettling of the Jewish people in Judea on their return from the Babylonian captivity, there were two religious groups among them. One party contented themselves with following only what was written in the Law of Moses. These were called **Zadikim**, the righteous. The other group added the constitutions and traditions of the elders, as well as other rigorous observances, to the Law and voluntarily complied with them. They were called **Chasidim** or the pious. From the Zadikim the sects of the Sadducees and Karaites were derived. From the Chasidim were derived the Pharisees and the Essenes. (See lengthy note by Barclay on Pharisees) They were not separatists in the sense of isolationists but they were highly

zealous for ritual and religious purity according to the Mosaic law and their own traditions which they added to the OT Law (cf warnings in Pr 30:6, Rev 22:18, 19+). Although their origin is unknown, they seem to have arisen as an offshoot from the "Hasidim" or "pious ones" during the Maccabean era. They were generally from the Jewish middle class and mostly consisted of laity (business men) rather than priests or Levites. They represented the orthodox core of Judaism and very strongly influenced the common people of Israel. According to Josephus, 6,000 existed at the time of Herod the Great. All uses in John - Jn. 1:24; Jn. 3:1; Jn. 4:1; Jn. 7:32; Jn. 7:45; Jn. 7:47; Jn. 7:48; Jn. 8:3; Jn. 8:13; Jn. 9:13; Jn. 9:15; Jn. 9:16; Jn. 9:40; Jn. 11:46; Jn. 11:47; Jn. 11:57; Jn. 12:19; Jn. 12:42; Jn. 18:3

**Mattoon** - Pharisee means "Separated one." They separated themselves from all ordinary life in order to keep every detail of the Law and the extra rules and regulations that were written by the scribes. The Pharisees were known as chaburah or brotherhood. There were never more than 6000 of them. They entered into a brotherhood by taking a pledge in front of three witnesses, that they would adhere to thousands of rules implemented by the scribes. The focus of their attention was on the outward appearances and adherence to rules instead of inward purity of the heart. For this, they were rebuked by the Lord. They were jealous of Jesus because He undermined their authority and challenged their views.

#### Related Resource:

- [Who were the Pharisees?](#)

**Named Nicodemus (Nikodemus 3530)** - Only used by John 5x in the NT (Jn. 3:1; Jn. 3:4; Jn. 3:9; Jn. 7:50; Jn. 19:39). This is a Greek name which was common among Jews and Gentiles. Josephus mentions this name (but not the same Nicodemus - [Josephus Antiquities 14.3.2](#)) (cf Greek names of Philip and Andrew Jn 1:40, 43+) . **Nicodemus** means conqueror of the people or populace, victorious (victor) among his people, "one who has won distinction among the people" (Zodhiates). He is not the young ruler in Lk 18:18+. John records what appears to be the "progress" of Nicodemus in coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. While

**Nicodemus** defends Christ against the unjust Pharisees was taking a very unpopular stand in his attempt to protect Jesus, and suggest he was in process of being saved after his initial encounter with Jesus (the Wind had begun to blow, so to speak, in the heart of Nicodemus) -

John 7:50-52+ **Nicodemus** (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" 52 They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet

**Nicodemus** appears to be a follower of Christ as He helps Joseph bury Jesus (See [Michelangelos' statute](#)) -

Jn 19:38-40 And after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. He came therefore, and took away His body. 39 And **Nicodemus** came also, who had first come to Him by night; bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. 40 And so they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

**Leon Morris** - We hear of Nicodemus only in this Gospel. He comes before us raising a hesitant (and apparently ineffectual) voice on behalf of Jesus when he is being discussed by the authorities after an abortive attempt to arrest him during the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:50–52). He is not recorded as saying anything at the trial of Jesus, but he helped Joseph of Arimathea at the burial (Jn 19:39). We may, I think, fairly infer that he had a love for the truth, but that he was rather a timid soul. In the end he came right out for Jesus, and that at a time when all the disciples forsook him. That is saying a lot for a timid man. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John page 208](#))

That Nicodemus was likely born again is a miracle as is every new birth. But Nicodemus had several "strikes" against him. In addition to John's description of this respected ruler and teacher, Jewish tradition said he was the third richest man in Jerusalem at this time. But what one has does not change what he or she is....a sinner! Jesus spoke to this "disadvantage" declaring ""How hard it is for those who are wealthy ([chrema](#)) to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Lk 18:24-25+, Mt 19:24) This prompted the question "Then who can be saved?" (Lk 18:26+) to which Jesus responded (PRAISE GOD FOR THIS RESPONSE!) "The things that are impossible ([adunatos](#)) with people are possible ([dunatos](#)) with God." (Lk 18:27+)

Paul added "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were **not many wise according to the**

**flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;** (NICODEMUS WAS ESSENTIALLY ALL OF THOSE THINGS!) 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God." (1 Cor 1:26-29)

#### Related Resource:

- [Who was Nicodemus in the Bible?](#)
- [Josh McDowell's classic "More than a Carpenter"](#) - good book to suggest to your skeptical friends!
- [How a Jewish man Michael Goldstone met Messiah](#) - site has multiple similar video testimonies

**A ruler of the Jews - Ruler of the Jews** refers to one of members of the Sanhedrin (cf Jn 7:26, Jn 7:48, Jn 12:42). Thus **Nicodemus** was a member of the Sanhedrin (usually translated "council" in NAS - e.g., Jn 11:47 - see [sunedrion](#)), the highest legal, legislative, and judicial body among the Jews.

In the NT uses the **council** or **Sanhedrin** consisted of 71 members (70 members plus the highest official, the high priest) from the chief priests, former high priests, and the chief priests or heads of the twenty-four courses or divisions, elders, and scribes or lawyers. Apparently the council itself determined who could belong. There were also local councils throughout the [Jewish Diaspora](#) with 23 members, which were also called [sunedrion](#). The **Sanhedrin** tried the most serious offenses and pronounced the severest penalties, including death by stoning (see Acts 6:12-7:60+) The Sanhedrin was formed in imitation of the seventy elders appointed by Moses (Nu 11:16ff.) - The Gospels reveal how the [sunedrion](#) tried to get rid of Jesus early in His ministry (John 11:47). Finally, with the help of Judas, they succeeded in having Him arrested, tried, and sentenced. After AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem, the **Sanhedrin** was abolished and replaced by the Beth Din (house of Judgment) that was composed of scribes whose decisions had only moral and religious authority.

**Ruler** (magistrate, official) ([758](#))([archon](#) from present participle of **archo** = to rule) describes one who has eminence in a ruling capacity, referring to earthly figures (Mt 20:25) such as rulers (Acts 4:26), Moses ( Acts 7:27, 35), of Christ as the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:5). Beth Din refers to one who has administrative authority (Ro 13:3; Titus 1:9), including Jewish leaders (Acts 23:5 = reference to the high priest, Lk 8:41 = "an official of the synagogue," Mt 9:18, 23 = ruler over a synagogue), members of the Sanhedrin (Lk 18:18, 23:13, 35, 24:20), of Gentile officials (Acts 16:19). "The title **ruler** is used in rabbinic literature for "a great man" or "prince.'" (Phillips) **Archon** refers to the devil as ruler over the demons in Mt 9:34; 12:24; Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15 and Eph 2:2 "the PRINCE (archon) of the power of the air." John's uses of **archon** - Jn. 3:1; Jn. 7:26; Jn. 7:48; Jn. 12:31; Jn. 12:42; Jn. 14:30; Jn. 16:11

**Bob Utley** on **ruler** - Those who thought they had arrived spiritually were told they had to begin again. Faith in Jesus, not adherence to rules (even godly rules), nor racial background, determines one's citizenship in the Kingdom. God's gift in Christ, not sincere, aggressive human religiosity, is the door to divine acceptance. Nicodemus' acknowledgment of Jesus as a teacher from God, though true, was not adequate. Personal trust, exclusive trust, ultimate trust in Jesus as the Messiah is fallen mankind's only hope! ([John 3](#))

**John Phillips** comments that "The only man who could boast a record like that (of Nicodemus) was Saul of Tarsus (Philippians 3:4-6). But after he came to Christ Paul evaluated all those things as "confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:4)." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

Have you ever heard the old spiritual "[Everybody talkin' about heaven ain't goin' there](#)"? **John MacArthur** writes "This line, from an old spiritual, accurately describes many in the church. Outwardly they identify with Christ, but inwardly they have never been genuinely converted (cf Titus 1:16+). Because they cling to a false profession, they fool themselves into thinking they are on the narrow path leading to life, when in reality they are on the broad road that leads to destruction. To make matters worse, their self-deception is often reinforced by well-meaning but undiscerning Christians who naively embrace them as true believers. Such confusion stems from the watered-down pseudo-gospels that are propagated from far too many pulpits. Cheap grace, market-driven ministry, emotionalism, subjectivism, and an indiscriminate inclusivism have all infiltrated the church with devastating consequences. As a result, almost any profession of faith is affirmed as genuine—even from those whose lives manifest no signs of true fruit (e.g., Luke 6:43-44+). For many, no one's faith is to be questioned. Meanwhile, key New Testament passages regarding the danger of false faith (e.g., James 2:14-26+) and the need for self-examination (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:5+) go unheeded. (See [John Commentary](#))

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**AT LEAST HE CAME** - The meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus was not by accident. Nicodemus did not stumble over Jesus,

but sought him out. He made it a point to find and be with Jesus. Often we are guilty of allowing our relationship with God to degenerate into occasional chance meetings where God has had to seek us out. Do we only turn to Christ in crises, finding little place or time for him in our daily lives? How often at night, when the hustle of the day settles down, do we think of Jesus in the silence and seek him out in prayer? ([Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

**John 3:2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."**

NET John 3:2 came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him."

GNT John 3:2 ο τοϛ λθεν πρ ς ατ ν νυκτ ς κα επεν ατ , αββ , ο δαμεν τι π θεο λ λυθαϛ διδ σκαλοϛ· ο δε ς γ ρ δ ναται τα τατ σημε α ποιε ν σ ποιε ς, ν μ θε ς μετ α το .

NLT John 3:2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

KJV John 3:2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

ESV John 3:2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

NIV John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

ASV John 3:2 the same came unto him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.

CSB John 3:2 This man came to Him at night and said, " Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him."

NKJ John 3:2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

NRS John 3:2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."

YLT John 3:2 this one came unto him by night, and said to him, 'Rabbi, we have known that from God thou hast come -- a teacher, for no one these signs is able to do that thou dost, if God may not be with him.'

NAB John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."

NJB John 3:2 who came to Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him.'

GWN John 3:2 He came to Jesus one night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that God has sent you as a teacher. No one can perform the miracles you perform unless God is with him."

BBE John 3:2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we are certain that you have come from God as a teacher, because no man would be able to do these signs which you do if God was not with him.

- **came.** Jn 7:50, 51. Jn 12:42, 43. 19:38, 39. Jdg 6:27. Is 51:7. Ph 1:14.
- **Rabbi.** Jn 3:26. Jn 1:38. 20:16.
- **we know.** The securing of indulgence for what is about to be said. For other instances of this figure see Mt 19:16. Ac 17:22. 22:3-6. 26:2, 3.
- **You.** Jn 4:19. 9:24, 29. Mt 22:16. Mk 12:14. Lk 20:21.
- **come from God.** Jn 16:27. for. Jn 5:36. 7:31. 9:16, 30-33. 11:47, 48. 12:37. 15:24. Ac 2:22. 4:16, 17. 10:38.
- **signs.** Jn 2:11.
- **unless** Mt 4:9. Jn 5:36. 9:33. 10:38. Jn 14:10, 11. 1 Sa 18:14. Acts 2:22, Acts 10:38.
- **him.** Ge 30:27.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A RULER RECOGNIZES A RABBI

Some have called Nicodemus a "Stealthy Seeker." where [stealthy](#) means marked by or acting with quiet, caution, and secrecy intended to avoid notice. While this is a nice alliterative title, I am not sure that it is accurate, for there are other reasons ([see note](#)) Nicodemus approached Jesus at night.

**This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him** - We could also entitle this passage "Nick at Night!" There are several reasons he may have come at night. It is interesting that night studies of the Law were held in high esteem by the rabbis. **Night** is a metaphor used in John's writing to indicate moral and spiritual darkness (John 1:5; John 3:19; John 8:12, John 9:4-5; John 12:35; John 20:1). Judas is an example of one in spiritual darkness who entered physical darkness John writing "So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was **night**." (Jn 13:30).

**D A Carson** on why at **night** - The best clue lies in John's use of **night** elsewhere: in each instance (John 3:2; 9:4; 11:10; 13:30) the word is either used metaphorically for moral and spiritual darkness, or, if it refers to the night-time hours, it bears the same moral and spiritual symbolism. Doubtless Nicodemus approached Jesus at **night**, but his own **night** was blacker than he knew (cf. Hengstenberg, 1.157-158; Lightfoot, p. 116). (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Rod Mattoon** - It is the story of a man who has everything, but really has nothing. He is famous, popular, respected, wealthy, yet, he is empty inside and dissatisfied with life. He is searching for answers to the longing in his heart and he finds himself at Jesus' door looking for light in the darkness. He is a teacher coming to be taught....Nicodemus had everything, yet, he seeks Jesus out. He was a teacher coming to be taught. If you are going to learn any kind of truth, you must come to Jesus with an open mind and a teachable spirit. The story of Nicodemus, in its larger context, sets before us the world's greatest tragedy (Jn 3:1-10), the world's greatest truths (Jn 3:11-15), the world's greatest text (Jn 3:16), and the world's greatest test (Jn 3:17-21).(Treasures from John)

**Phillips** - Nicodemus was rich, respected, religious. He was a ruler. But somehow none of these things brought the peace and joy for which he longed. Maybe this new prophet had some insights along these lines. So it was that Nicodemus, as fine a specimen of the natural man as we could wish to find, put his pride in his pocket and sought a private interview with the young preacher. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Leon Morris** on why at **night** - This is usually taken to be due to fear (so, for example, Michaels) or at least to a careful regard for people's opinions. Nicodemus was a prominent man; since he was "Israel's teacher" (Jn 3:10) it would never do for him to commit himself to the unofficial Teacher from Galilee, not at any rate until and unless he was absolutely sure of his ground. If this is the explanation of the **night** visit it is not without its interest that Jesus says nothing in condemnation. He was content to receive Nicodemus just as he was. But it is not at all certain that the reason for the **night** visit was fear. The Pharisee may have chosen this time in order to be sure of an uninterrupted and leisurely interview. During the day Jesus would be busy and there would be crowds (crowds of common people!). Not so at **night**. Then there could be a long, private discussion. Others associate the late visit with the rabbinic commendation of those who pursued their studies into the **night** hours (**ED: IT WAS COMMON IN JESUS' DAY FOR RABBIS TO SPEND HOURS OF DARKNESS TALKING AND DISCUSSING THEOLOGY -- IS THIS TRUTH SOMEWHAT IRONIC? THEY WERE SEEKING SPIRITUAL LIGHT AT NIGHT BUT REMAINED IN SPIRITUAL DARKNESS WITHOUT BELIEF IN JESUS!**). Perhaps most scholars today think that the words should be taken symbolically. Jesus is the Light of the world (Jn 8:12+), and it was out of the (spiritual) darkness in which his life had been lived that Nicodemus came to the light. **It would be quite in his manner for John to have more than one of these meanings in mind.** (Borrow [The Gospel according to John page 210](#))

**Criswell** on why at **night** - (1) his fear of criticism; (2) his desire for a private conference before committing himself to Jesus; (3) his desire for uninterrupted conversation; or (4) his lack of opportunity during the day (cf. Jn 7:50). It should not be overlooked that "night" has a foreboding significance in this Gospel (cf. Jn 9:4; Jn 11:10; Jn 13:30; Jn 19:34) (Believer's Study Bible)

Our search for truth is hindered by  
The darkness of the night,  
Until the Bright and Morning Star  
Reveals His brilliant light.  
—Sper

**NICODEMUS WAS SINCERE  
BUT SINCERELY LOST!**



**Lost** is used in the figurative sense indicating that Nicodemus was not yet born again, not yet regenerate, not yet saved as we commonly say today. One has to first understand the "bad news" that they are lost (dead in their trespasses and sins - Eph 2:1+) before they can appreciate the "good news" that Jesus saves. ([What does it mean to be spiritually lost?](#))

**Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher**- NLT = "God has sent you to teach us." Nicodemus recognized Jesus was not a mere man from Galilee. And he was not alone for he uses the plural "**we**" which he is speaking of other men of his esteemed class (cf "we" in Jn 9:31+). **Have come** is in the [perfect tense](#) signifying permanence or abiding presence. Observe Nicodemus (and some other religious leaders) has the insight to recognize this obscure Galilean peasant Jesus as (1) Rabbi, (2) come from God and (3) a teacher (not THE teacher).

**Paul Apple** comments on Nicodemus' : "Complimentary Commencement (1) Granting Professional Respect -- "Rabbi" (2) Appreciating Authoritative Doctrine -- "we know that You have come from God as a teacher" (3) Recognizing Divine Power -- "for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." ([John Commentary](#))

Regarding Jesus as **a teacher** from God, Scottish philosopher and theologian James Stuart once said that "The teaching of Jesus has had a power and an effect with which the influence of no other teacher can even for a moment be compared."

For Nicodemus to address Jesus as **Rabbi** "was a long step for Nicodemus as a Pharisee to take, for the Pharisees had closely scrutinized the credentials of the Baptist in John 1:19-24+." ([Robertson](#)) So here Nicodemus calls Jesus **Rabbi** out of respect (even as Andrew and John who would become his disciples - Jn 1:38+) and in another nighttime setting Judas betrays Jesus calling Him "**Rabbi**" (Mt 26:25, Mt 26:49, Mk 14:45)! Same Name, two diametrically opposite destinies. Calling Jesus **Rabbi** or even Lord (see Mt 7:21-23+) does not result in salvation. It is only by believing fully in one's heart and soul that He is from God and that He is God that results in salvation (Ro 10:9-10+). [Nathanael's](#) recognition of Jesus was greater than that of Nicodemus for he acknowledged Him as "**Rabbi**, You are the Son of God (Mk 1:1+); You are the King of Israel." (Jn 1:49+)

**Rabbi** (4461)(**rhabbi** from Hebrew [rab 07227](#) = >400x in OT - great one, master, chief) means my master (most common rendering in KJV) or my teacher. It was an respectful title of honor by which one would address a teacher who was recognized for their expertise in the Mosaic Law or Scriptures. Jesus' disciples repeatedly address Him as **Rabbi** (Jn. 4:31; Jn. 6:25; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 11:8) The suffix **-bi** signified "my master" "and was a title of respect by which teachers were addressed. The suffix soon lost its specific force, and in the NT the word is used as courteous title of address." (Vine) It is interesting that In Mt. 23:7-8 Jesus forbade His disciples to desire to use it ("do not be called **Rabbi**"). " ([Was Jesus a rabbi?](#))

**Rabbi** - 15x in 15v - Matt. 23:7; Matt. 23:8; Matt. 26:25; Matt. 26:49; Mk. 9:5; Mk. 11:21; Mk. 14:45; Jn. 1:38; Jn. 1:49; Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:26; Jn. 4:31; Jn. 6:25; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 11:8. Not found in the Septuagint.

See [Wikipedia on Rabbi](#).

**Gibrant on Rabbi** - Theologians were held in such high regard that according to Talmudic tradition even King Jehoshaphat addressed them as "my father, my teacher, my lord." Since the scribes were generally addressed as rabbi in the presence of others, it gradually became a term used for those who had completed their studies and were ordained teachers of the Law. With regard to the New Testament use of rabbi the suffix lost its specific force by the middle of the First Century A.D.; hence, it became a courteous title of address (ibid.). As such it was applied to John the Baptist in John 3:26. (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Zodhiates** - This was introduced as a title into the Jewish schools under a three-fold form, Rab, as the lowest degree of honor; Rab with the first person suffix i, Rabbi, my master, with higher dignity; and Rabboni, meaning my great master, the most honorable of all. This was publicly given to only seven persons, all of the [school of Hillel](#) and of great eminence.... In the days of Christ the title (RABBI) was misused by Jewish teachers in that they used it to require implicit obedience to their decisions and traditions and words rather than to those of the law and the prophets. Our Lord charged the Jewish scribes and Pharisees with being very fond of this presumptuous title, but commands His disciples not to be called Rabbi in the Jewish acceptance of the word (Matt. 23:7, 8). Although the title Rabbi was often given to the Lord Jesus, we do not find that He ever rebuked those who gave it to Him because He was in truth the Teacher sent from God, even that great Prophet who should come into the world, and of whom the Lord had said by Moses in Deut. 18:18, 19: "It shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." (Borrow [The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament](#))

**Teacher** (1320)([didaskalos](#) from [didasko](#) = teach to shape will of one being taught by content of what is

taught (< cp [didaskalia](#)) is one who provides instruction or systematically imparts truth. The **teacher** teaches in such a way as to shape will of one being taught by content of what is taught or at least that is the desired goal. **Didaskolos** in John - Jn. 1:38; Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:10; Jn. 8:4; Jn. 11:28; Jn. 13:13; Jn. 13:14; Jn. 20:16. **Didaskalos** is the usual translation of the Hebrew word **Rabbi** (see Jn 1:38+, cp the Aramaic word for teacher = Rabboni in Jn 20:16+), a term which in Jesus' day described those who were acknowledged as authorities on the Old Testament and were teachers of divine truth.

**Didaskalos** refers to Jesus (the Master Teacher) in 41 of 58 NT uses. Twice Jesus calls Himself **Teacher** (Mt 26:18, Jn 13:13-14+). He is referred to as Teacher by His disciples (Mk 4:38+; Mk 9:38+; Mk 13:1+; Lk 7:40+; Lk 21:7+), by the Pharisees (Mt 8:19, 12:38), by Pharisees and Herodians (Mt 22:16); Sadducees (Mk 12:19+), a teacher of the law (Mk 12:32+), Jewish deceivers (Lk 20:21+); the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18+), tax collectors (Lk 3:12+) and His friend Martha (Jn 11:28+). As an aside someone has said our great Teacher writes many of His best lessons on the blackboard of affliction.

**Richards** writes that "Jesus' teaching focused on shaping the hearers' perception of God and God's kingdom, and thus it dealt with the implications of a personal relationship with God. In John's Gospel, much of Jesus' public instruction focused on himself and his own place as Son of God."

**Mounce** makes the point that when the Jewish leaders called Jesus "Teacher", they may not have been sincere "For instance, in Lk 10:25+ an expert in the law comes to test Jesus and calls him didaskalos. However, attempts to expose him as a pretender to the title of teacher are unsuccessful and therefore serve to endorse his status as rabbi (Mt 22:46; Mk 12:34+; Lk 20:39+). (Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words)

And although Jesus was frequently called Teacher, **C S Lewis** makes the point that He was far more than just a **Teacher**

"I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the **Son of God** (Mk 1:1+); or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (Mere Christianity)

**For (gar)** is a term of explanation which always begs the question "What is the writer explaining?" In context Nicodemus is explaining how he can be so certain that Jesus is from God as a teacher.

**No one can do these signs that You do** - So the main indication that Jesus is **from God** are the **signs** He does. Which specific signs John does not tell us. Here the **signs** were beginning to accomplish in Nicodemus (who becomes born again) God's objective which summarized by John in Jn 20:30-31 - "Therefore many other **signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (THE MESSIAH), the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His Name (cf Mt 1:21+)."

While Nicodemus words sound as if they are moving in the right direction of seeing in Jesus a genuine divine activity and an admission that Jesus is from God and does the works of God, these things are not enough and Jesus does not commend him for his positive beliefs. As we saw in John 2:23-25+ Jesus sees hearts of men and discerns superficial, non-saving faith from genuine, saving faith. **John Piper** adds "Seeing signs and wonders, and being amazed at them, and giving the miracle worker credit for them that he is from God, saves nobody. **This is one of the great dangers of signs and wonders: You don't need a new heart to be amazed at them. The old, fallen human nature is all that's needed to be amazed at signs and wonders.** And the old, fallen human nature is willing to say that the miracle worker is from God. The devil himself knows that Jesus is the Son of God and works miracles (Mark 1:24+)." ([What Happens in the New Birth - Part 1](#))

**Unless God is with him** - Nicodemus recognizes the **signs** as supernatural **signs**. However Nicodemus' theology is not completely accurate for supernatural signs do not always guarantee God is with the one producing the signs. For example, Scripture tells us that deceivers and false prophets can perform **signs** (the Antichrist will perform signs in 2 Th 2:9, his false prophet will perform signs in Rev 13:13-14+).

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing (**Doing** is in the [imperfect tense](#) over and over. Jesus did His first sign in Cana, but

now He was doing many **signs** in Jerusalem. Already Jesus had become the center of all eyes in Jerusalem at this first visit in His ministry.) (Jn 2:23+)

Therefore many other **signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written **so that** (PURPOSE OF THE SIGNS) you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (THE MESSIAH), the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (Jn 20:30-31+)

**Can** (1410)(**dunamai**) in the **present tense** conveys Nicodemus' belief that Jesus had the inherent (supernatural) ability to continually accomplish supernatural **signs**. And remember from other Gospels Jesus derived His **dunamis** from the indwelling Spirit, Luke recording for example "Jesus returned to Galilee in the **power** (**dunamis**) of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district." (Lk 4:14+). Although Luke is describing the impact of Jesus' ministry in the "power of the Spirit" which occurred in Jesus' second year of ministry, clearly this same "power of the Spirit" had allowed Him to perform **signs** which had spread the news about Him throughout Jerusalem.

**NOTE:** The derivative word **dunamis** (from **dunamai**) refers to intrinsic power or inherent ability, the power or ability to carry out some function, the potential for functioning in some way, the power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. The word group (dunamai, dunamis, dunatos, etc) gives us our English word **dynamic**, (synonyms = energetic, functioning, live, operative, working) which describes that which is marked by usually continuous and productive activity or change. That which is dynamic is characterized by energy or forces that produce motion, as opposed to that which is static.

**Signs** (4592)(**semeion**) akin to **semaino** = to give a sign; **sema** = a sign) is a distinguishing mark or symbol that carries a special meaning or like a simple sign points to something else. **Semeion** is used of God's miraculous works (contrary to usual course of nature) which point to spiritual truth. Semeion describes a miracle whose purpose is that of attesting the claims of the one performing the miracle to be true. Stated another way, in the NT a **sign** speaks of a token which has behind it a particular message to be conveyed. In other words, in John's Gospel (where semeion is most concentrated) the apostle recorded certain miracles not for the wonder (cf "wonders") they produced, but because of the message they taught (Jn 20:31+). The purpose of a sign is to direct attention away from its unusual nature to the meaning and the significance of what it points to, in this case, to Jesus as divine and thus speaks of outward compelling proof of His divine authority. In John a sign points to deeper spiritual significance in connection with the event (Jn 2:11, 18+).

#### **Related Resource:**

- Table of Seven Signs performed by Jesus in John's Gospel

**Unless God is with him** - This is a conditional statement of the third class which speaks of it as a probability but not a definite fact. It was enough "probability" to attract this ruler of the Jews! Peter states it as a fact that God was with Jesus in his "summary" of Jesus' 3 year ministry declaring "*You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God **anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power**, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for **God was with Him**. (Acts 10:38+). So what Nicodemus only alluded to, Peter knew as truth. And to reiterate, that truth is that Jesus performed these signs in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**THOUGHT** - While believers today should not seek or expect to perform signs like Jesus, we can live a supernatural life like Him (1 Cor 11:1+, 1 Jn 2:6+, 1 Pe 2:21+) that should cause interested and curious unbelievers (like Nicodemus) to recognize that we could not live the way we live, respond the way we respond (to trials and afflictions), speak the way we speak, etc, unless God the Spirit was with us, in fact even IN us! Hallelujah! May our Father in Heaven grant that we each live up to our Spirit filled "supernatural potential" in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation that others might be drawn to come speak with us about Jesus. (Php 2:15+, 1 Pe 3:15+ cf Mt 5:16+) Amen!

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**NECESSITY OF A SEARCHING HEART** - Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers. A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well-educated we are, we must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach us the truth about God. A searching heart is marked by several characteristics:

- Humility in seeking and admitting personal need.
- Perseverance in overcoming obstacles that may keep us from finding and following Christ.
- Insight in recognizing that the gospel message relates to our lives.
- Willingness to submit to the lordship of Christ.

- Obedience in going beyond mental assent to active dependence on God's promises and guidance. (LAC)
- 

**QUESTIONS/ANSWERS** - It is quite common to find people treating spiritual questions as if asking them was a perfectly valid pursuit, even if they had no real hope of getting an answer. That kind of treadmill leads to despair. If we are not serious about answers, questions—even hard questions—are a waste of time. We don't know exactly what questions Nicodemus planned to ask Jesus, but we do know he went to the right source. If all we want to do is ask questions, any ear will do. But if we are hungry for answers, God will be our source. He has provided his Word, his presence, and the freedom of prayer to place any question before him. Others who have brought their questions and quests to God can also provide valuable help to us. Jesus wants to be more than just an item of discussion. He has answers for the heart and soul. (LAC)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - There is an old story about two courtiers of a certain king who wearied their monarch with their incessant arguments as to whether or not a person had to be born a gentleman, or whether he could become a gentleman by training, discipline, and ingrained habit. The king finally dismissed them from court and ordered them to go out into the world and seek conclusive proof for their claims. A year to the date they would each present their proofs and he would settle the argument once and for all.

The year passed. The courtier who said that one could become a gentleman had traveled far. He was in a distant land and still had not found his proof. But one day, sitting gloomily in a wayside inn, he sat up with astonishment. He had ordered a cup of chocolate, and to his amazement he saw that it was being brought to him by the innkeeper's cat. But this was no ordinary cat. This cat had been trained to stand up on its hind legs. It had been dressed in a tiny uniform and it had learned to balance a tray in its forepaws. The courtier watched spellbound as the creature, contrary to nature, walked slowly toward him balancing the tray with his cup of chocolate.

He saw the implications at once. If a cat could be trained to do a thing like that, why couldn't a man be drilled into becoming a gentleman? It proved his point. He paid a vast sum and secured the astonishing feline and headed for home.

News of the cat leaked out and the courtier's rival was plunged in despair. He, too, had traveled far but was returning home empty-handed. He was sure he had lost. But then, just a day or two before the scheduled appearance in court, he saw something in a shop window that brought a smile to his lips. He made a purchase but kept it well hidden from view.

On the day of the trial the first courtier presented the cat to the king as proof that a person could be so trained that he could overcome all natural handicaps and become that most accomplished of civilized persons, a gentleman. As the king sat on his throne, the remarkable cat, attired in miniature court dress, walked carefully on its hind legs, made its way slowly down a red carpet, carrying a tray of chocolate to the king. The court broke into applause. Everyone looked with admiration at the cat and with pity at the other courtier, the one who said one must be born a gentleman.

But the man was ready. With a bow to the king he opened the box in which he had his proof. The courtier released half a dozen white mice and instantly the cat forgot its training and education, its discipline and ingrained habit. Its natural instinct surfaced and, in a flash, off it went after the scampering mice. The discussion was settled once and for all. The cat returned purring loudly several hours later, its courtly attire rather disheveled.

In Nicodemus we see what culture, religious education, and moral training can do. But man in sin is still man in sin, a prey to the fallen instincts of sin which, given the appropriate time, place, circumstance, and opportunity, will override the veneer with which religion, culture, education, and moral conscience overlay the old, fallen adamic nature. (Phillips Borrow [Exploring John](#))

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### Warren Wiersbe - JOHN 3

**A birth from above (Jn 3:1–9).** In our first birth, we are “born of the flesh” and “born of water”; but in our second birth, we are “born from above [again]” and “born of the Spirit.” Our first birth leads to death, but our second birth brings eternal life. The new birth is a new beginning that results in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

**A Savior from above (Jn 3:10–21).** Jesus is the Son of God come down from heaven. He is the serpent Moses wrote about (Num. 21:4–9); He is the Father's love gift (Jn 3:16); He is the Light in a dark world (Jn 3:19). Like the serpent, He was lifted up, and He died on a cross for the sins of the world. All who look to Him by faith receive eternal life.

**A witness from above (Jn 3:22–36).** John's ministry was given to him from heaven (Jn 3:27). His task was to bear witness to Jesus (Jn 1:6–8). Jesus is the Word, and John was only a voice proclaiming the Word (Jn 1:23). Jesus is the Bridegroom, but John was only the best man. John did no miracles, but his witness was used to win people to Christ, even after he was dead (Jn 10:40–42). Can you honestly say, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30)?

Nicodemus - Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, but he finally came out into the light and identified with the Lord Jesus (Jn 19:38–42). Nicodemus gave Jesus an honest hearing (Jn 7:45–52), examined the Word, and became a believer. (Borrow [With the Word](#))

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## Nic At Nite

I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. —John 12:46

Today's Scripture: John 3:1-21

According to the apostle John, Nicodemus “came to Jesus by night” (John 3:2). Was this Pharisee skulking under cover of darkness, embarrassed or ashamed that he, as one of the ruling class, was curious about Jesus?

Some have suggested that it was just cooler at night. Others have said that evening was a better time to ask Jesus questions because it was quieter and there were fewer distractions.

We really don't know the reason Nicodemus went to Jesus at night, but John seemed determined to make a point of that specific fact. Every time he mentioned Nicodemus, he identified him by saying something like: “You know who I'm talking about—the guy who came to Jesus by night” (see Jn 7:50+; Jn 19:39).

Nicodemus, no doubt, was quite moral and lived according to Mosaic Law. People probably thought he was a pretty good person. Yet none of that mattered. He was in the dark about who Jesus really was, and he wanted to know the truth. So he was drawn from the darkness into the presence of “the light of the world” (John 8:12+).

Jesus calls us “out of darkness” too (1 Peter 2:9+) and promises that whoever believes in Him will not stay in the dark (John 12:46).  
By: Cindy Hess Kasper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Faith in Christ is not a leap into the dark; it's a step into the Light.

## John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Barclay - 'This is the truth I tell you—unless a man is reborn from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

NET John 3:3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

GNT John 3:3 περὶ θῆ ἡ σοφία ἐπέειπεν αὐτῷ, μὴ μὴ λῶ σοι, νῦν τις γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν, ὁ δὲ ναίει δὲ νῦν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

NLT John 3:3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

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

ESV John 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

NIV John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "

ASV John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

CSB John 3:3 Jesus replied, "I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

NKJ John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

NRS John 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

YLT John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, 'Verily, verily, I say to thee, If any one may not be born from above, he is not able to see the reign of God;'

NAB John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

NJB John 3:3 Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.

GWN John 3:3 Jesus replied to Nicodemus, "I can guarantee this truth: No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

BBE John 3:3 Jesus said to him, Truly, I say to you, Without a new birth no man is able to see the kingdom of God.

- **Truly.** See on Jn 1:51. Mt +\*5:18. 2 Co 1:19, 20. Re 3:14.
- **Unless** Mt 4:9. Jn 3:5, 6. Jn 1:13. Mt 18:3. 1 Co 2:14. Ga 6:15. Ep 2:1, 4, 5. Titus 3:5. Jas 1:18. 1 Pe 1:3, 23. 1 Jn 2:29. 3:9. 5:1, 18.
- **again.** or, from above. John 3:7, 31. Jn 1:13. Jn 19:11. 2 Co 5:17. Ga 4:9. Gal 6:15. Jas 1:17. 3:15, 17. 1 Pe 1:23.
- **he cannot see.** Jn 3:5, 36. Jn 1:5. 12:40. Dt 29:4. Jer 5:21. Mt 13:11-16. 16:17. Mk 16:16n. 1 Co 6:9, 10. 15:50. 2 Co 4:4. He 12:14.
- **the kingdom of God.** Jn 18:36, 37. 1 Ch 28:4, 5. Mt 12:28. 25:34. Mk 1:15. Lk 4:43. 22:29, 30. Ac 1:3, 6. Acts 8:12. 14:22. 19:8. 20:25. 28:23, 31. Ro 9:8. Ro 14:17. 1 Co 4:20, 1 Cor 6:9, 10, 1 Cor 15:50. Ga 5:21. Ep 5:5. Col 1:13. 4:11. 1 Th 2:12. 2 Th 1:5. 2 Ti 4:1, 18. He 12:28. Ja 2:5. 2 Pe 1:11. Re 5:10. Rev 12:10
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JESUS GOES DIRECTLY FOR THE HEART OF NICODEMUS

**Jesus answered and said to him** - Actually Nicodemus does not ask a question (at least none is recorded by John). **B F Westcott** says "The Lord **answered** not his words, but his thoughts." As we saw in Jn 2:25+ Jesus "knew what was in man," so He recognizes Nicodemus' greatest need. As a religious Pharisee, Nicodemus had spent his entire life focused on **doing** works to attain right standing with God (and entrance into His Kingdom). But as their **dialogue** evolves into a "**Messianic monologue**" (especially beginning in Jn 3:10), Jesus **expounds** to Nicodemus that a person is saved not by his (Nicodemus') **doing** but by His (Jesus') **dying!** (Jn 3:16) In short, Jesus **cuts to the chase** and describes the greatest need of every man and woman who have been **born once** is that they must be **born twice**; i.e., they must be **born again!** The old saying is short but sure....

**Born once, die twice.**

**Born twice, die once.**

**THOUGHT** - If you are a "seeker" or a "skeptic" reading these words, then be careful for you may end up like Felix when he heard Paul "as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you." (Acts 24:25+) Or you may procrastinate like King Agrippa who (in effect) heard the good news of need for a new birth and declared "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts 26:28+) We have no record of either man being born again and likely both men entered into eternal punishment where they will forever ponder their tragic words! Don't be like Felix or Agrippa but believe for "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (Jn 3:36+) There is no middle ground. No neutrality in this spiritual war for your soul. Believe and be saved (Acts 16:31+) " Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"" (2 Cor 6:2)

**Truly, truly I say to you** - **Truly** is **amen** meaning "It is and shall be so." **Truly, truly** is used only by John to introduce a statement of special import and was used three times (Jn 3:3; 5; 11) in Jesus dialogue with Nicodemus! (cf Jn 1:51; Jn 3:3, 5, 11; Jn 5:19, 24–25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; Jn 8:34, 58; Jn 10:1, 7; Jn 12:24; Jn 13:16, 20–21, 38; Jn 14:12; Jn 16:20, 23; Jn 21:18). And so Jesus' first words emphasize the supreme importance of the truth He is preparing to present. Only Jesus uses the double **amen** and only Jesus uses **amen** at the beginning of a sentence rather than the end. When used at the end **amen** confirms the preceding words and invokes their fulfillment. But placed at the beginning of the sentence **amen** gives a strong affirmation, guaranteeing the truth of what He says and underscores His authority, for He alone is the "Amen, the faithful and true Witness." (Rev 3:14+) for as Paul said "all the promises of God in Him (CHRIST) are yea, and in Him **Amen**, unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor 1:20KJV) In other words, the promises of God find their sure fulfillment, their "Yes," in Christ!

**Truly** (281)(**amen**) is a transliteration from the Hebrew word **amen** which in turn is from the Hebrew verb **aman** = to be firm, to believe, this word conveying the idea of certainty). **Amen** has been called the best-known word in human speech. To say **Amen** confirms a statement and as noted above when doubled signifies the special importance of the statement. John's Gospel has 25 uses of **amen** and every use is a double **amen**. None of the synoptic Gospels use a "double amen."

**Truly, truly** (**amen, amen**) is only used by Jesus in the Bible - 25x in 25v - 8:8; Jn. 1:51; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:11; Jn. 5:19; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 5:25; Jn. 6:26; Jn. 6:32; Jn. 6:47; Jn. 6:53; Jn. 8:34; Jn. 8:51; Jn. 8:58; Jn. 10:1; Jn. 10:7; Jn. 12:24; Jn. 13:16; Jn. 13:20; Jn. 13:21; Jn. 13:38; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 16:20; Jn. 16:23; Jn. 21:18

**Unless one is born again** - This is the single most important subject in all of time and eternity, and yet there is sadly much confusion on what it means to be born again. The following discussion will look at the individual words Jesus uses and at the end of this verse note is a summary from Gary Brady on 15 things the new birth is not ([see note](#)). This passage clearly describes **the narrow way** about which Jesus commands His hearers to enter in the Sermon on the Mount declaring

**“Enter** (**aoist imperative** - No one obey this command to enter unless [the Holy Spirit provides the desire and power!](#) of Jn 3:5, 6 8) through the narrow gate (cf "unless one is born again"); for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to **destruction** (**apoleia** cf [cognate apollumi](#) in Jn 3:15, 16+), and there are many who enter through it. “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.(Mt 7:13-14+, cf Lk 13:24,25+, Acts 3:19+)

**Unless** (**ean me**) is literally "if not" and is translated except, **unless** (e.g., in Mt 5:20+). This conditional conjunction is used 4x in John 3 (Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:27) **Unless** is a critical conjunction in this passage. In English dictionaries "**unless**" means "except under the circumstances that; except on the condition that." Another says "**Unless** is defined as except something else happens." In this case that "something else" that must happen is that Nicodemus must be **born again**. This is not optional! There is no "Plan B."

Just as the first birth is necessary for physical life,  
So the second birth is necessary for divine life.

**One is born** - **Born** can refer to a man fathering or a woman bearing a child, although in this instance it relates to a particular event, rather than a process.

**Born** (1080)(**gennao** from **genos** = offspring, in turn from **ginomai** = to become) means literally to beget (as spoken of men as in Mt 1:2-16KJV) or less commonly to bear (spoken of women - Lk 1:13, Lk 1:57, Lk 23:29, Jn 16:21).

John uses **gennao** in his first epistle to describe one of the tests to assess whether a person is truly **born again** writing "you know that everyone also who practices ([present tense](#) - as their general direction, not perfection!) righteousness is **born** ([perfect tense](#) = speaks of permanence of one who has been born again. So even this tense underscores the truth that one cannot lose their salvation!) of Him." (1 Jn 2:29+) John's point is the **new birth** will result in a **new pattern or lifestyle of behavior** of pursuing those things which are "right" in God's eyes. The corollary is that if a person says "Yes, I have been born again," and yet sees absolutely no change in their lifestyle or behavior, then it is very possible they are deceiving themselves and have never actually been **born again**. (see 2 Cor 13:5+).

John's uses of **gennao** to describe spiritual rebirth (except Nicodemus who is still thinking literal birth) - 1 Jn. 2:29; 1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Jn. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:4; 1 Jn. 5:18

John 1:13+ (Jn 1:12 = to those who believe in His name) who were **born**, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but **of God**. (**born...of God**)

John 3:3+ Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born** again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:4+ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be **born** when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be **born**, can he?"

John 3:5+ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born** of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

John 3:6+ ( "That which is **born** of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born** of the Spirit is spirit.

John 3:7+ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be**born** again.'

John 3:8+ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is **born** of the Spirit."

1 John 2:29+ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 3:9+ No one who is **born** of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

1 John 4:7+ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is**born** of God and knows God.

1 John 5:1+ Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is **born** of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

1 John 5:4+ For whatever is **born** of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

1 John 5:18+ We know that no one who is **born** of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

In His own image God created man,  
He formed his body from the dust of earth;  
But more than that, to all who are in Christ  
He gives eternal life by second birth.  
—Hess

**Again** - **Again** in English means once more, anew, another or second time. As discussed more below the word for **again** (**another**) can mean can speak of place (*from above*) or time (*again*). Nicodemus obviously interprets **another** as a reference to **time** as implied by his question "How can a man be **born when he is old**? He cannot enter a **second time** into his mother's womb and **be born**, can he?" (Jn 3:4). Once again Jesus speaks somewhat parabolically, but in this case (in contrast to the parabolic statement He made to Jews in John 2:19, 20, 21+) He explains to Nicodemus what born again means spiritually. **Morris** adds that "Both senses are true, and in the Johannine manner our author probably intends that we understand both." **William Barclay's** paraphrase picks up both meanings of **another** rendering it "unless a man is **reborn** [time] from **above** [place]."

John spoke of this supernatural, spiritual rebirth earlier writing "But as many as **received** Him (JESUS AS SAVIOR, REDEEMER, LORD), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who **believe** (RECEIVE PARALLELS BELIEVE) in His name, **who were born**, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, **but of God**." (Jn 1:12+, Jn 1:13+)

**Alan Carr** - So many people have this thing confused! They are seeking **reformation**. That is, they are trying to "**turn over a new leaf**" or "**get a new lease on life**". What the world needs is not reformation, but regeneration! Every person under the sound of my voice needs regeneration and not reformation! You see, reformation is just **whitewashing**, but regeneration will wash you white (Rev 7:14+)! Reformation will put new cloths on a man, but regeneration will put a **New Man** in his cloths! What the world needs, what you need, and what I need is regeneration! You see, if you have been born only once, then friend you are going to die twice! But, if you have been born twice, you will never die, because death has been swallowed up in life (**The Must of the New Birth**)

Jesus is calling for a **radical regeneration**, not a **religious reformation**.

**Again** (from above)(509)(**another** from **ano** = above, upward, up + **suffix** "-then" = from) literally means from above (place) with a secondary meaning of again (time). This is probably another example of John's use of terms that have two meanings (**double entendre**), both of which are true. John uses **another** to speak of place in Jn 3:31 ("He [Jesus] Who comes from **above**") and Jn 19:11 ("unless it had been given you from **above**"). **Another** is used in Mt 27:51 and Mk 15:38 in describing the curtain in the Temple torn from **top** (another) to bottom." All uses of **another** - Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 1:3; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:7; Jn. 3:31; Jn. 19:11; Acts 26:5; Gal. 4:9; Jas. 1:17; Jas. 3:15; Jas. 3:17

**Barclay** says **another**, has three different meanings. (i) It can mean from the beginning, completely radically. (ii) It can mean again, in the sense of for the second time. (iii) It can mean from above, and, therefore, from God.

**Harris** observes that "'Although Nicodemus understood it to mean **again**,' leading him to conclude that Jesus was speaking of a second physical birth, Jesus' reply in Jn 3:6–8 shows that He referred to the



need for a spiritual birth, a birth “from **above**.”

**D A Carson** on [anōthen](#) - This regeneration is [anōthen](#), a word that can mean ‘from above’ or ‘again’. Because Nicodemus understood it to mean ‘**again**’ (cf. ‘a second time’, Jn 3:4), and Jesus did not correct him, some have argued that ‘**again**’ must stand. But Jesus also insists that this new birth, this new begetting, this new regeneration, must be the work of the Spirit, who comes from the realm of the ‘above’. Certainly the other occurrences of [anōthen](#) in John mean ‘**from above**’ (Jn 3:31±; Jn 19:11, 23). As he does with other terms, John may be choosing to extend [double meaning](#) to this one in John 3:3, 7, both ‘from **above**’ and ‘**again**’; he certainly does not mean less than the former. Readers who have followed the Gospel to this point will instantly think (as Nicodemus couldn’t) of John 1:12–13±: ‘**to be born again**’ or ‘**to be born from above**’ must mean the same thing as **to become children of God**, to be ‘**born of God**’, by believing in the name of the incarnate Word. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**NET Note** - The word ([anōthen](#)) has a double meaning, either “**again**” (in which case it is synonymous with [palin]) or “**from above**”. This is a favorite technique of the author of the Fourth Gospel, and it is lost in almost all translations at this point. John uses the word 5 times, in Jn 3:3, 7; 3:31; 19:11, 23. In the latter 3 cases the context makes clear that it means “from above.” Here (Jn 3:3, 7) it could mean either, but the primary meaning intended by Jesus is “from above.” Nicodemus apparently understood it the other way, which explains his reply, “How can a man be born when he is old? He can’t enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born, can he?” The author uses the technique of the “*misunderstood question*” often to bring out a particularly important point: Jesus says something which is misunderstood by the disciples or (as here) someone else, which then gives Jesus the opportunity to explain more fully and in more detail what he really meant.

O ye who would enter that glorious rest,  
And sing with the ransomed the song of the blest,  
The life everlasting if you would obtain,  
‘Ye must be born again’.  
-- W. T. Sleeper

#### Related Resources:

- What is regeneration according to the Bible?
- [What is the meaning of spiritual rebirth?](#)
- [What does it mean to be a born again Christian?](#)

## THE CONCEPT OF REGENERATION OR NEW BIRTH IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

While the phrase **new birth** is not in the Old Testament, clearly this truth is found in many passages, some of which are noted below. As Gary Brady points out “A major way to speak about regeneration then is in terms of being born again. However, there are other pictures—being washed, receiving a new heart or spirit, having God’s law in the mind and on the heart, and having the heart circumcised. In each case, we are talking about a major radical and inward change brought about by God.”

Isaiah 44:3 ‘For (EXPLAINS Isa 44:2) I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants;

**Wiersbe** - He will pour water on the land and His Spirit on the people (59:21; Ezek. 34:26; Joel 2:28-29; John 7:37-39), and both will prosper to the glory of the Lord. The final fulfillment of this will be in [the future Kingdom Age when Messiah reigns](#). (Be Comforted - Isaiah).

**MacArthur** - The extensive blessing of physical conditions will favor the nation in the coming kingdom age (Isa 43:19, 20); they were also symbolic of spiritual refreshment from the Holy Spirit and God Himself (Isa 32:15; Joel 2:28, 29).

Ezekiel 11:19-20± And **I will give them one heart**, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and **give them a heart of flesh**, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them (THEY WILL BE ENABLED TO OBEY FOR NOW THEY HAVE A NEW POWER, THE SPIRIT). Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

Ezekiel 36:26-27± “Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you**; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you

to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

**Illustration of a "New Heart"** - On one occasion Dr, Christian Barnard, the 1st surgeon ever to do a heart transplant, impulsively asked one of his patients, Dr. Philip Blaiberg, "Would you like to see your old heart?" - At 8PM on a subsequent evening, the men stood in a room of the Groote Schuur Hospital, in Johannesburg, South Africa. – Dr. Barnard went up to a cupboard, took down a glass container and handed it to Dr. Blaiberg. Inside that container was Blaiberg's old heart. For a moment he stood there in stunned silence – The first man in history ever to hold his own heart in his hands. Finally he spoke and for 10 minutes plied Dr. Barnard with technical questions. Then he turned to take a final look at the contents of the glass container, and said, "So this is my old heart that caused me so much trouble." He handed it back, turned away and left it forever! Believers still have the same heart...but it is radically new!

Jeremiah 31:33+ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "**I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jeremiah 32:39+ **I will give them one heart and one way**, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them.

Deuteronomy 30:6+ Moreover the LORD your God will **circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants (THIS WILL FINALLY BE [CONSUMMATED](#) AT THE END OF [THE GREAT TRIBULATION](#) - THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE - Jer 30:7+ - SEE Zechariah 12:10-14+), to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

#### **NT PARALLELS TO SPIRITUAL CIRCUMCISION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the letter (NOT BY KEEPING THE LAW); and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Ro 2:28-29+)

And in Him **you were also circumcised** with a circumcision made without hands (THUS CLEARLY A SPIRITUAL "CIRCUMCISION"), in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; (Col 2:11+)

#### **Related Resources:**

- Excursus on [Circumcision of the Heart](#)
- [New Covenant in the Old Testament](#)

Passages in the New Testament that speak of the new birth...

2 Cor 5:17+ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new** ([kainos](#) = BRAND NEW) **creature**; the old things passed away; behold, **new** ([kainos](#)) things have come.

Titus 3:5+ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of **regeneration** ([paliggenesia](#)) and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Galatians 6:15+ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a **new** ([kainos](#)) **creation**.

Ephesians 4:24+ and put on the **new** ([kainos](#)) **self**, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

1 Peter 1:3+ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again** ([anagennao](#)) to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:23+ **you have been born again** ([anagennao](#)) not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

James 1:18+ In the exercise of His will He **brought us forth** ([apekueo](#) = give birth to) by the Word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

1 John 2:29+ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices (AS THEIR GENERAL LIFESTYLE = "DIRECTION" NOT PERFECTION =NOT SINLESS BUT SIN LESS!) righteousness is **born of Him**.

1 John 3:9+ No one who is **born of God** practices sin, because His seed abides in him (INDWELLING SPIRIT GIVES POWER TO ENABLE ONE NOT TO PRACTICE SIN); and he cannot sin (AS ONE'S LIFESTYLE), because he is **born of God**.

1 John 4:7+ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is **born of God** and knows God.

1 John 5:1+ Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is **born of God**, and whoever loves the Father loves the child **born of Him**.

1 John 5:4+ For whatever is **born of God** overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

1 John 5:18+ We know that no one who is **born of God** sins (HABITUALLY, AS ONE'S LIFESTYLE); but He who was **born of God** keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

While not specifically describing the new birth Jesus did give similar instruction regarding how and who enters the **Kingdom** declaring

"Truly ([amen](#)) I say to you, **unless** ([ean me](#)) you (PLURAL = ALL MEN) are converted ([strepho](#)) and become like children, you will not (STRONG DOUBLE NEGATIVE "ou me" = ABSOLUTELY NOT) **enter the kingdom of heaven.**" (Mt 18:3)

But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the **kingdom of God** belongs to such as these. 17 "Truly ([amen](#)) I say to you, whoever does not receive ([dechomai](#) = EQUIVALENT OF BELIEVE IN THE KING OF) the **kingdom of God** like a child will not (STRONG DOUBLE NEGATIVE "ou me" = ABSOLUTELY NOT) **enter it at all.**"(Lk 18:16-17+, cf Mk 10:15)

When we're reborn--made new in Christ--

It should be plain for all to see

That God has changed us from within

And placed us in His family.

--Sper

## COMMENTARY ON BORN AGAIN

**Leon Morris** said "in one sentence, He (JESUS) sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for, and demands that he be re-made by the power of God." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John page 212](#))

**John Piper** - "What happens in the new birth is not getting new religion but getting new life." (See John Piper's summary of John's evidences that one has truly experienced the new birth)

**Thomas Adams** said: "Repentance is a change of the mind, and regeneration is a change of the man....The Creation of the world is a shadow of the regeneration of a Christian.... Adam was created after the image of God, and placed in Paradise; so the new man is confirmed to the image of Christ, and shall be reposed in the paradise of everlasting glory."

**Merrill Tenney** writes that "Birth is our mode of entrance into the world and brings with it the potential equipment for adjustment to the world. To be born again, or "born from above," means a transformation of a person so that he is able to enter another world and adapt to its conditions." (Borrow [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

To be highborn is nice, but to be newborn is necessary!

**Bill Ascol** on new birth - A supernatural work of the Holy Spirit of God which is performed in the life of a sinner whereby the sinner is given a new heart, being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, and is made able and willing to repent of his sin before God and trust alone in Jesus Christ to be his Lord and Saviour.

**Gary Brady** - Bishop J. C. Ryle wrote of 'that change of heart and nature which a man goes through when he becomes a true Christian'. He calls regeneration the distinguishing mark of the true believer. Being a Christian is more than merely saying you are one. The phrase 'born-again Christian' is really tautology (saying the same thing in two different ways). To be a Christian, in the New Testament sense, there has to be a real change of heart within, a new birth. (Recommended reading - [What the Bible Teaches About Being Born Again](#))

**Edward Gross** on new birth - The birth by which the new creation of God is begun in the soul. It is the first personal act of rescue wrought by God in us to fulfil his plan of salvation effected by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ....Without regeneration we would forever remain spiritually blind and dead.

**Constable** - The implication of Jesus' illustration of new birth is that life with God in the future will require completely new equipment. Nicodemus had claimed to see something of who Jesus was by His signs. Jesus replied that no one can **see** God's **kingdom**, the end in view, without new birth.

**John Calvin** - By the term born again He means not the amendment of a part but the renewal of the whole nature. Hence it follows that there is nothing in us that is not defective....Man must be born again, because he is flesh.' Our very creatureliness makes new birth necessary. 'The grace of God has no charms for men till the Holy Spirit gives them a taste for it.'

**George Sweeting** - Napoleon believed that the fate of every battle was decided in the space of five minutes. All his maneuvering and planning led to that strategic moment of crisis, the moment of action and decision. So with you, my friend. Your future, your eternal welfare is decided in but a few moments of decision. . . .If we take the first three words of John 1:13+ and the last two words, we have the phrase, "who were born...of God." That's a good definition. A Christian is one who is born of God.

**Guzik** - It was taught widely among the Jews at that time that since they descended from Abraham, they were automatically assured of heaven. In fact, some Rabbis taught that Abraham stood watch at the gate of hell, just to make sure that none of his descendants accidentally wandered in there.. Most Jews of that time looked for the Messiah to bring in a new world, in which Israel and the Jewish people would be pre-eminent. But Jesus came to bring new life, in which He would be preeminent.

**Edwin Blum** - To be **born again** or born "from above" (**anōthen** has both meanings; e.g., "from above" in Jn 19:11 and "again" in Gal. 4:9+) is to have a spiritual transformation which takes a person out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God (cf. Col. 1:13+ "from the **domain of darkness**, [RULED BY SATAN] and transferred us to the **kingdom of His beloved Son**" = **ED: THIS TRANSFER OCCURS IMMEDIATELY WHEN ONE IS BORN AGAIN**). The **kingdom** is the sphere or realm of God's authority and blessing which is now invisible but will be manifested on earth (Mt. 6:10+).

**Paul Apple** has an interesting comment writing that John 3 "contains the proper definition of the **baptism of the Holy Spirit** referred to in Chap. 1 (Jn 1:33+ "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to **baptize in water** said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who **baptizes in the Holy Spirit**'); that is why it is so important to study passages in the context of the entire book." (INTERESTING THOUGHT!) Apple goes on to comment on the the new birth noting that "Birth is a dramatic, climactic experience. No mistaking it!"

**Rod Mattoon** asks **What does born again mean?** - This phrase carries three meanings. It comes from the Greek word *anōthen* {an'-o-then}. (1) It means "from the beginning, completely or radically." (2) It also means "again for the second time." (3) It means "from above, from God." All three are found in the phrase "born again." To be born again is to undergo such a radical change that it is like a new birth. It is to have something which can be described as being born all over again. The whole act of the new birth is not a human achievement because change comes from the grace and power of God. It is a spiritual birth in a person that takes place when they trust Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. (Treasures from John)

**ILLUSTRATION** - When translator Des Oatridge, working in Papua New Guinea, came to the words "born again" in John's Gospel, he asked his native co-translator to think of a good way to express it. The man explained this custom: "Sometimes a person goes wrong and will not listen to anybody. We all get together in the village and place that person in the midst of us. The elders talk to him for a long time. 'You have gone wrong!' they say. 'All your thoughts, intentions, and values are wrong. Now you have to become a baby again and start to re-learn everything right.'" It was the answer Des was looking for. Today the words of John 3:3 in [Binumarien](#) read "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he becomes like a baby again and relearns everything from God's Word." ([See related video](#))

**D A Carson** writes that "Predominant religious thought in Jesus' day affirmed that all Jews would be admitted to that **kingdom** apart from those guilty of deliberate apostasy or extraordinary wickedness (e.g. Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1). But here was Jesus telling Nicodemus, a respected and conscientious member not only of Israel but of the Sanhedrin, that he cannot enter the kingdom unless he is born again." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1** says "**All Israel have a portion in the world to come** for it says, "Your people, all of them righteous, shall possess the land for ever; They are the shoot that I planted, my handiwork in which I glory" (Isaiah 60:2). And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: He who maintains that resurrection is not a biblical doctrine, that the torah was not divinely revealed, and an epikoros. Rabbi Akiva says: "Even one who reads non-canonical books and one who whispers [a charm] over a wound and says, "I

will not bring upon you any of the diseases which I brought upon the Egyptians: for I the Lord am your healer" (Exodus 15:26). Abba Shaul says: "Also one who pronounces the divine name as it is spelled." (Bolding added)

## "KINGDOM VISION"

**He cannot see - Cannot see** literally "Absolutely continually will not be able to **see**" where **able** is the same verb [dunamai](#) (and in [present tense](#) = continually) as above in Jn 3:2 ("can do these signs"). Jesus is speaking first and foremost of spiritual sight ("insight"), of seeing with the eyes of faith so to speak as in 2 Cor 4:18+ (cf 2 Cor 5:7+). In John 3:5 Jesus says one "**cannot enter into the kingdom of God**," so clearly to **see** is the same as to **enter** the Kingdom.

The new birth prepares you for life in a new kingdom!

**Alan Carr** - Notice what kind of place Heaven is. It is the "**kingdom of God**." Do you understand what He is saying? It has been said that [Heaven](#) "Is a prepared place for a prepared people." Did you know that this is true? One of the most precious benefits of the new birth is the fact that we receive a new nature when we are saved, 2 Peter 1:4+. When you get [saved](#), you receive God's nature; a nature from Heaven! The new birth prepares you for life in a new kingdom! The only way for you to get into Heaven is for you to first get Heaven into you! Besides, if you went to heaven with a [lost, fallen nature](#), you would be miserable! Heaven would become Hell for you! You would never enjoy that land unless you had a new nature! All the worship, the praise, the glories of Heaven would be offensive to you if you went there lost! It would be against your nature to enjoy anything in that land. That is why we need a new birth; it prepares us to enter in and to enjoy that new land! It gives us a new nature and it gives us a new life!...You will never see a bird swimming laps in a pool. Why? It's against its nature! You will never see a cow dancing in a Broadway show. Why? It's against its nature! You will never see a pig flying from tree limb to tree limb. Why? It's against its nature! My friends, you will never see a lost sinner in Heaven! Why? Because it's against their nature! If you are going there, then you need a new nature. The only way to get that new nature is through the new birth. Why? Your first birth provided you with a physical, fleshly nature. You need a new birth, a birth from Heaven to provide you with a new, spiritual nature, Jn 3:6. That is why Jesus says, "You must be born again!" It is not an option! Don't settle for a maybe so, hope so or think so kind of salvation. Get born again and you will know so! The new birth is a must! ([Sermon](#))

**The kingdom of God** - As discussed below this subject can be confusing, as there are several aspects to the **Kingdom of God** which I have attempted to demonstrate in the following table ([click](#)). The question is which aspect of the **Kingdom of God** would be of interest to this religious Jewish ruler?

While the following is **somewhat speculative**, my personal opinion is that Nicodemus would have been thinking about the earthly Kingdom of God in which Israel would be restored as the leading nation and Messiah would rule. Why would I suggest that possibility? It is instructive and fascinating that a major topic which Jesus taught His Jewish disciples for 40 days after His resurrection was the **Kingdom of God**. Luke records "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and **speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God**" (Acts 1:3+) And after their "course on the Kingdom" they ask Jesus "Lord, is it at this time You are **restoring the kingdom to Israel**?" (Acts 1:6+). Clearly these Jews were looking for the **Kingdom** and Jesus does not correct them! He simply does not specifically answer their question. In short, it seems very reasonable to propose that like these Jewish disciples, the Jewish ruler Nicodemus had this same longing for the beginning of the future [Messianic Kingdom](#).

**NET Note on the kingdom of God** - John uses the word **kingdom** ([basileia](#)) only 5 times (Jn 3:3, 5; Jn 18:36 [3×]). Only here is it qualified with the phrase **of God**. The fact that John does not stress the concept of the **kingdom of God** does not mean it is absent from his theology, however. Remember the messianic implications found in John 2, both the wedding and miracle at Cana and the cleansing of the temple. For Nicodemus, the term must surely have brought to mind the [Messianic Kingdom](#) which Messiah was supposed to bring. But Nicodemus had missed precisely this point about Who Jesus was. It was the Messiah Himself with whom Nicodemus was speaking. Whatever Nicodemus understood, it is clear that the point is this: He misunderstood Jesus' words. He over-literalized them, and thought Jesus was talking about **repeated physical birth**, when he was in fact referring to **new spiritual birth**.

**The Kingdom of God** is complex but a simple way to look at it is to say that it is that realm where Jesus reigns as King. Whether Jesus' emphasis was on the present or future aspects of God's kingdom is not important. For those who are born again, they receive a new heart and it is in that new heart that Jesus reigns as King. And so believers are in the "Kingdom" spiritually speaking, but there is coming a future day when we will also enter the physical Kingdom of Christ.

The **kingdom** obviously speaks of a king, and the first thing a person needs to see by faith is the King of

that kingdom, Jesus Christ. As the Spirit of God carries out the miraculous work of regeneration, they begin to see Him by placing their trust fully in Him, being born again, and at that moment of new birth the eyes of their heart are enlightened and they can see spiritual truths for the first time in their life! At that moment they also become subjects of the invisible spiritual **kingdom of God** even though they may not fully understand what that entails (it was years before I fully understood this great truth). In Luke 17:21+ Jesus declares "**behold**, the **Kingdom of God** is in your midst." He is referring to the invisible **Kingdom of God** which every believer enters by grace through faith in Christ and what writers have referred to as the "**already now**" or realized aspect of God's Kingdom (Lk 17:20, 21-see commentary, cf advantageous of this "already now" aspect of the Kingdom in Ro 14:17+, cf 1 Co 4:20NLT = "living by God's power" = [dunamis](#) = relying on the supernatural power of the Spirit!). Then Jesus continues in Lk 17:22-37 (see commentary) where He speaks of the "**not yet**" or future literally visible aspect of the **Kingdom of God**. One day our faith will become literal sight and not only will we see King Jesus, we will see and experience His glorious [Messianic Kingdom on earth](#), the "not yet" aspect of the **Kingdom of God**.

**Kingdom** (932)([basileia](#) from **basileus** = a sovereign, king, monarch) denotes sovereignty, royal power, dominion. **Basileia** in many NT uses can have a temporal component ( past, present, future) as well as a spiritual and/or physical component depending on the context. Three Basic Meanings of [basileia](#) =

- (1) The power exercised by a king, the act of ruling - kingship, royal rule, reign
- (2) Basileia can sometimes refer to the land, the realm or the territory over which a king rules. (Mt 4.8, Mt 12:25, 26, 24:7, Mk 3:24, 6:23, 13:8, Lk 11:17, 18, 21:10)
- (3) Basileia can refer to the spiritual rule of God in the hearts of people now (Ro 14.17) In Mk 10:15 Jesus declares "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God (TANTAMOUNT TO "BELIEVE IN THE KING" OF THE KINGDOM) like a child will not enter it at all." (cf Mt 18:3).

<b>THE KINGDOM OF GOD/HEAVEN PRESENT &amp; FUTURE ("NOW &amp; NOT YET")</b>		
<b>Internal Invisible</b>	<b>In Hearts of Believers</b>	<b>Present Age (Between 1st &amp; 2nd Comings)</b>
<b>External Visible</b>	<b>Literal On earth</b>	<b>Messianic Age (After 2nd Coming)</b>
<b>External Visible</b>	<b>Literal New Earth</b>	<b>Eternal Age (After Christ gives Kingdom to Father)</b>

1. **Internal, Invisible - in hearts of believers only** - in this present age (between Christ's First and Second Comings). In other words the Kingdom of God is present to the extent that people live in submission to God's authoritative Word.
2. **External, Visible - literal earthly Kingdom** - It is future in that the day is coming when Jesus returns, the [Second Coming](#), and rules with a rod of iron (Rev 19:15+) on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:7+) for 1000 years (I am a literalist on Rev 20:1-10+)
3. **External, Visible - literal heavenly Kingdom** - only believers ("internal" aspect of Kingdom) - following age #2 (After Christ gives the Kingdom to His Father - see 1 Cor 15:24-26)

#### Related Resources

- Kingdom of God commentary in notes on Luke 17:20ff and notes on Acts 1:3.
- [The Arrival of God's Kingdom](#) - Tony Garland
- [What is the kingdom of God?](#)
- [What did Jesus mean when He said, "The kingdom of God is within you" \(Luke 17:21, KJV\)?](#) (See also Luke 17:21 commentary)
- John MacArthur's [sermon "Kingdom Parables"](#) which gives an explanation of universal Kingdom and mediatorial Kingdom.

**THOUGHT** - Dear reader all of this "[erudite](#)" discussion on the **Kingdom of God** can obscure the most important question - **Are you**

**in the Kingdom of God? Are you born again?** In the eighteenth century [George Whitefield](#) preached hundreds of times (perhaps even more than a thousand times), on the text 'You must be born again.' Someone once asked him "Why do you always preach that we must be born again?" His answer was simple but profound -- "**Because, we must be born again.**"

Had Christ a thousand times,  
Been born in Bethlehem,  
But not in thee, thy sin  
Would still thy soul condemn.  
-- Scheffler

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There are a few ways that physical birth can be used to illustrate spiritual birth.

1. Physical birth provides life – A babies have life because they are born! Likewise, spiritual birth provides a person with spiritual life, 1 John 5:12.
2. Physical birth only happens once – Physically speaking, you can only be born one time! (Ill. All the mothers said: Amen!) Spiritually, the same thing is true! Your spiritual birth is a one time for all time experience. It cannot be undone and it cannot be repeated!
3. Physical birth takes place because of the suffering on another – A mother enters the very jaws of death to bring life into this world. Jesus entered the cruel jaws of death so that you might be born again. The new birth rests squarely upon the pain and suffering of another!
4. Physical birth gives the infant a brand new start – No baby is born with a past! They have no past, only a future! So it is with the new birth. When you get saved, you get a brand new start. Your past is wiped away and a new, clean future lies in front of you! ([Alan Carr](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Not only was Benjamin Franklin a great statesman and inventor, but he was also penned and received letters from famous people from all over the world. One day he received what may have been the most important letter he had ever received from anyone. The letter was from British preacher George Whitefield and was dated August 17, 1752. Whitefield wrote

"I find you grow more and more famous in the learned world. As you have made a pretty considerable progress in the mysteries of electricity, I would now humbly recommend to your diligent, unprejudiced pursuit and study, the mystery of the **new birth**. It is a most important, interesting study; and, when mastered, will richly answer and repay you for all your pains. One, at whose bar we are shortly to appear, hath solemnly declared, without it we cannot enter the **kingdom of heaven**. You will excuse this freedom. I must have something of Christ in all my letters (WHAT A GREAT EXAMPLE FOR ALL BELIEVERS -SOMETHING OF CHRIST IN OUR LETTERS OR CONVERSATION!)."

In one of his lighter moments, Benjamin Franklin penned his own epitaph. Sadly he did not profess to be a born-again Christian (most writers feel he was a [deist](#) as were a number of the founding fathers), but it seems that he must have been influenced by Paul's teaching of the resurrection of the body. Here's what he wrote:

The Body of B. Franklin, Printer:  
Like the Cover of an old Book  
Its contents torn out,  
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,  
Lies here, Food for Worms,  
  
But the Work shall not be wholly lost:  
For it will, as he believ'd,  
Appear once more  
In a new and more perfect Edition,  
Corrected and amended by the Author.

One more story of Benjamin Franklin and Whitefield - Benjamin Franklin became an enthusiastic supporter of Whitefield.<sup>12</sup> Franklin, a Deist who rarely attended church, did not subscribe to Whitefield's theology, but he admired Whitefield for exhorting people to worship God through good works. Franklin printed Whitefield's sermons on the front page of his Gazette, devoting 45 issues to Whitefield's activities. Franklin used the power of his press to spread Whitefield's fame by publishing all of Whitefield's sermons and journals. Many of Franklin's publications between 1739-1741 contained information about Whitefield's work, and helped promote the evangelical movement in America. Franklin remained a friend and supporter of Whitefield until Whitefield's death in 1770.

As pastor **Phil Newton** wrote "Benjamin Franklin remained a **deist**- detached from a personal relationship to God through faith in Christ alone. He had eyes, ears, and understanding yet they did not come to the aid of his grasping kingdom life."

**Marvin Olasky** adds that "Insofar as Christians, through God's grace, become interested in that which they cannot physically touch, it appears clear that Franklin, **unless** the change occurred when he was very old, was not touched by that grace." We will have to wait until we get to Heaven to see!

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**Spurgeon** told of a missionary who visited a primitive hut and became nauseated by the filthy floor on which he had to sit. He suggested to his host that they scrub the dirty surface with soap and water, but the man replied, "the floor is just clay—packed down and dry. Add water and it turns to mud. The more you try to wash it, the worse the mess becomes!" Yes, the hut needed something besides an earthen floor. **So it is with the human heart: it is hard and dirty, and nothing will help it.** Man needs a new heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27+; see Excursus on [Circumcision](#) -). He must be born again from above! Have you ever had a spiritual birthday? Have you been born again?

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**BORN AGAIN IN THE HELLENISTIC CULTURE-** The Greek world had a non-Biblical concept of born again or new birth.

**The ancient world knew about a counterfeit "rebirth."** A famous ceremony at that time was the [Tarobolium](#). In this ceremony, a person would go down into a pit which was covered with lattice. A bull was slain on the lattice cover. Its throat was slit and the blood would pour down into the pit. The person in the pit would be covered in blood and when they came out of the pit, they would be considered reborn for eternity. When Christianity came into the world with a message of rebirth, it came with a message that the world was interested in. Those who trust Christ are covered by the blood of Christ in God's eyes. The blood atones for our sins.

**William Barclay** - Now this (NEW BIRTH) was not an idea which was in the least strange to the people who heard it in NT times. The **JEW** knew all about **REBIRTH**. When a man from another faith became a Jew and had been accepted into Judaism by prayer and sacrifice and baptism, he was regarded as being reborn. "A proselyte who embraces Judaism," said the rabbis, "is like a new-born child." So radical was the change that the sins he had committed before his reception were all done away with, for now he was a different person. It was even theoretically argued that such a man could marry his own mother or his own sister, because he was a completely new man (!!!), and all the old connections were broken and destroyed. The Jew knew the idea of rebirth.

The **GREEK** also knew the idea of **REBIRTH** and knew it well. By far the most real religion of the Greeks at this time was the faith of the mystery religions. The mystery religions were all founded on the story of some suffering and dying and rising god. This story was played out as a passion play. The initiate had a long course of preparation, instruction, asceticism and fasting. The drama was then played out with gorgeous music, marvellous ritual, incense and everything to play upon the emotions. As it was played out, the worshipper's aim was to become one with the god (NOTE INCREDIBLE COUNTERFEIT OF [ONENESS BELIEVERS HAVE WITH CHRIST](#) IN THE NEW COVENANT!) in such a way that he passed through the god's sufferings and shared the god's triumph and the god's divine life. The mystery religions offered mystic union with some god. When that union was achieved the initiate was, in the language of the Mysteries, a **twice-born**. The [Hermetic Mysteries](#) had as part of their basic belief: "There can be no salvation without regeneration." Apuleius, who went through initiation, said that he underwent "a voluntary death," and that thereby he attained "his spiritual birthday," and was "as it were reborn." Many of the Mystery initiations took place at midnight when the day dies and is reborn. In the Phrygian, the initiate, after his initiation, was fed with milk as if he was a new-born babe. (cp 1Pe 2:2+).

The ancient world knew all about REBIRTH & REGENERATION. It longed for it and searched for it everywhere. The most famous of all Mystery ceremonies was the taurobolium. The candidate was put into a pit. On the top of the pit there was a lattice-work cover. On the cover a bull was slain by having its throat cut. The blood poured down and the initiate lifted up his head and bathed himself in the blood; and when he came out of the pit he was renatus in aeternum, reborn for all eternity. When Christianity came to the world with a message of rebirth, it came with precisely that for which all the world was seeking. ([Barclay - John Commentary](#))

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**Mattoon** - The necessity of the new birth is vividly portrayed in the life of George Whitefield. At sixteen, he became deeply convicted



of his sin. He tried everything to become acceptable to God. He wrote, "I fasted for 36 hours twice a week. I prayed formal prayers several time a day and almost starved myself to death during Lent, but only felt more miserable. Then by God's grace I met Charles Wesley, who put a book in my hand that showed me from the Scriptures that I must be 'born again' or be eternally lost." Finally, Whitefield understood that he had to trust in Jesus Christ. He believed and was both forgiven and changed. After he became a preacher, he spoke at least a thousand times on the subject, "You must be born again."

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## Joseph Alleine's book - [Alarm to the Unconverted](#)

- [Sampling of his choice excerpts](#)
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Bob Pierce, founder and first president of World Vision speaking of salvation said: "There are too many grandchildren of Christ in the world, those whose parents were Christians but they aren't. Nowhere in the Bible does God claim grandchildren—just children, born again by faith in Christ."

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A medical missionary was leaving by ship for a foreign field. The famous [Andrew Bonar](#) of Scotland came to the pier to bid farewell to his friend, only to discover that the doctor was to be accompanied by his sister. Turning to her, he said, "My dear, I don't believe I've ever had the privilege of making your acquaintance. I'm pleased that you are going as your brother's assistant, and I'd like to remember you in my prayers. What is your first name?" "Christine," was the reply. "I like that!" said the aged servant of the Lord, "for you have Christ in your name. I trust you also have Him in your heart!" The woman looked away and was silent for a moment. Before she could think of an answer, the last call to board the ocean liner was given. Convicted by Bonar's words, she began to think about her relationship to the Lord. Although she went to church regularly, she suddenly realized that she was not truly saved and had never actually become a "new creature" in Christ. That night she knelt and asked the Savior to pardon her sins and make her His child. Much later an article appeared in the Moody Monthly relating this incident. It concluded by saying that her years of consistent living and faithful service showed the reality of Christine's decision.) (Story from Alan Carr)

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**Barna Research Study** -- Despite the efforts of evangelists, parachurch ministries and local churches, the percentage of American adults who are born again Christians is no different now than in 1982, according to a study by the Barna Research Group. The study found that 34% of all Americans can be identified as born again—that is, they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and say they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Christ as their Savior. Among those surveyed, 62% said they had made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today. However, among those who have made a commitment to Christ, only 55% believe they will go to heaven because of accepting Christ as their personal savior (the basic belief in the "born again" movement). Most of those surveyed said they would go to heaven because of living a good life, or obeying the 10 commandments, or because all people will go to heaven. Others who said they had made a commitment to Christ said they were unsure about what will happen to them after they die.

The following anecdotal comment is included but is frankly difficult to rationalize with Scripture: A study conducted by The Roper Organization for High Adventure Ministries in 1990 found that the moral behavior of "born again" Christians actually worsened after their conversions. Examined were incidences of illegal drug use, driving while intoxicated and marital infidelity. (**ED COMMENT:** Could it be that the definition of "born again" was a watered down secularized one and not the Biblical definition of a work of grace through faith that results in a radical transformation of one's person and purpose [eg, 2Co5:17, cp Titus 1:16]?! Let the Scripture be the judge.)

**Boice** gives an **Illustration** - Quite a few years ago Governor Neff, of the state of Texas, received an invitation to speak at one of the penitentiaries in that state. He spoke to the assembled prisoners, and afterward said that he would be around for a while to listen to anything any of the convicts might wish to tell him. He would take as much time as they wanted, and anything they would tell him would be kept in confidence. The convicts began to come, one at a time. One after another told him a story of how they had been unjustly sentenced, were innocent, and wished to get out. Finally one man came through who said to him, "Governor Neff, I don't want to take much of your time. I only want to say that I really did what they convicted me for. But I have been here a number of years. I believe I have paid my debt to society and that, if I were to be released, I would be able to live an upright life and show myself worthy of your mercy." This was the man whom Governor Neff pardoned. I know, of course, that there are imperfections in that illustration. For one thing, some of the men who claimed to be innocent might actually have been innocent. For another, the man who was pardoned might have been deceiving the governor and might have led a much more disreputable life after his release. Still, the point of the story stands: the first step in the rehabilitation of any man lies in his admission of guilt. To benefit from a doctor, the patient must admit that he is sick. (An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 1: The Coming of the Light)

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**JONATHAN EDWARDS** On January 12, 1723, I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down; giving up myself,

and all that I had to God; to be for the future, in no respect, my own; to act as one that had no right to be himself, in any respect. And solemnly vowed to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else, as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were; and his law for the constant rule of my obedience: engaging to fight against the world, the flesh and the devil, to the end of my life.

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**MARTIN LUTHER** - I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God," because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. . . . Night and day I pondered until . . . I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before "the righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.

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## **You Must Be Born Again**

Read: John 3:1-18

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. —John 3:3

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (Jn. 3:7). These words seem out of context. We think Jesus should have uttered them in the next chapter of John, when He met the woman beside the well (Jn 4:6-26+). She had made a mess of her life and might have welcomed a chance to start over again. That's why we put up the sign at the rescue mission, You Must Be Born Again, because it seems to apply to people like her.

But Jesus spoke those words to Nicodemus, the Hebrew equivalent of a college professor, a federal judge, and a bishop all in one. Nicodemus was everything that the shady lady by the well was not. Yet it was to this cultivated, respected religious leader that Jesus declared, "You must be born again."

Why did Jesus tell Nicodemus that? The answer is simple. Like all of us, Nicodemus was born in sin, so he needed a second birth—a spiritual birth. He needed to change the focus of his faith from religion to Jesus (3:15). Only Christ could provide forgiveness and eternal life.

If Nicodemus, the best that religion could produce, needed to be born again, then Jesus' words certainly apply to all of us. What about you? Have you been born again? By Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

WHY DO WE NEED A SPIRITUAL BIRTH? We are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). We all commit sin (Ro 3:23). We are made righteous by putting our faith in Jesus, who died on the cross (Ro 5:12-19).

We are saved by Christ's dying, not by our doing.

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**H. A. IRONSIDE** When Bishop John Taylor Smith, former Chaplain General of the British Army, was in this country at the time of the D. L. Moody Centenary meetings, it was my privilege to hear him one noon hour in Christ Church, Indianapolis. The sanctuary was crowded with eager listeners, to whom the Bishop spoke most solemnly, yet tenderly, upon the necessity of the new birth, using the text quoted above (John 3:7; "Ye must be born again"). As a telling illustration, he related the following incident:

On one occasion, he told us, he was preaching in a large cathedral on this same text. In order to drive it home, he said: "My dear people, do not substitute anything for the new birth. You may be a member of a church, even the great church of which I am a member, the historic Church of England, but church membership is not new birth and 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' The rector was sitting at my left. Pointing to him, I said, You might be a clergyman like my friend the rector here and not be born again, and 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' On my left sat the archdeacon in his stall. Pointing directly at him, I said, You might even be an archdeacon like my friend in his stall and not be born again and 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' You might even be a bishop, like myself, and not be born again and 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Then he went on to tell us that a day or so later he received a letter from the archdeacon, in which he wrote: "My dear Bishop: You have found me out. I have been a clergyman for over thirty years, but I had never known anything of the joy that Christians speak of. I never could understand it. Mine has been hard, legal service. I did not know what was the matter with me, but when you pointed directly to me and said, You might even be an archdeacon and not be born again, I realized in a moment what the trouble was. I had never known anything of the new birth."

He went on to say that he was wretched and miserable, had been unable to sleep all night, and begged for a conference, if the

bishop could spare the time to talk with him. "Of course, I could spare the time," said Bishop Smith, "and the next day we got together over the Word of God and after some hours we were both on our knees, the archdeacon taking his place before God as a poor, lost sinner and telling the Lord Jesus he would trust Him as his Saviour. From that time on everything has been different."

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## **J C Ryle - Regeneration means, that change of heart and nature which a man goes through when he becomes a true Christian.**

I think there can be no question that there is an immense difference among those who profess and call themselves Christians. Beyond all dispute, there are always two classes in the outward Church--the class of those who are Christians in name and form only, and the class of those who are Christians in deed and in truth. All were not Israel who were called Israel, and all are not Christians who are called Christians. "In the visible Church," says an article of the Church of England, "the evil be ever mingled with the good."

Some, as the Thirty-nine Articles say, are "wicked and void of a lively faith." Others, as another article says, "are made like the image of God's only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and walk piously in good works." Some worship God as a mere form--and some in spirit and in truth. Some give their hearts to God--and some give them to the world. Some believe the Bible, and live as if they believed it--others do not. Some feel their sins, and mourn over them--others do not. Some love Christ, trust in Him, and serve Him--others do not. In short, as Scripture says, some walk in the narrow way--some in the broad way; some are the good fish of the Gospel net--some are the bad fish; some are the wheat in Christ's field--some are the tares.

I think no man with his eyes open can fail to see all this, both in the Bible, and in the world around him. Whatever he may think about the subject I am writing of, he cannot possibly deny that this difference exists.

Now what is the explanation of the difference? I answer unhesitatingly-- Regeneration, or being born again. I answer, that true Christians are what they are, because they are Regenerate; and formal Christians are what they are, because they are not Regenerate. The heart of the true Christian has been changed. The heart of the Christian in name only, has not been changed. The change of heart makes the whole difference.

This change of heart is spoken of continually in the Bible, under various emblems and figures--

- Ezekiel calls it, "a taking away the stony heart, and giving an heart of flesh;"--"a giving a new heart, and putting within us a new spirit." (Ezekiel 11:19<sup>+</sup>; Ezekiel 36:26<sup>+</sup>)
- The apostle John sometimes calls it, being "born of God," sometimes, being "born again," sometimes, being "born of the Spirit." (John 1:13<sup>+</sup>; John 3:3-6<sup>+</sup>)
- The apostle Peter, in the Acts, calls it "repenting and being converted." (Acts 3:19<sup>+</sup>)
- The Epistle to the Romans speaks of it as a "being alive from the dead." (Ro 6:13<sup>+</sup>)
- The second Epistle to the Corinthians calls it "being a new creature--old things have passed away, and all things become new." (2 Cor. 5:17<sup>+</sup>)
- The Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of it as a resurrection together with Christ--"You has He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1<sup>+</sup>); as "a putting off the old man, which is corrupt--being renewed in the spirit of our minds--and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph 4:22, 24<sup>+</sup>)
- The Epistle to the Colossians calls it a "putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." (Col. 3:9, 10<sup>+</sup>.)
- The Epistle to Titus calls it, "the washing of Regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5<sup>+</sup>)
- The first Epistle of Peter speaks of it as "a being called out of darkness into God's marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9<sup>+</sup>) And the second Epistle as "being made partakers of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4<sup>+</sup>)
- The first Epistle of John calls it a "passing from death to life." (1 John 3:14<sup>+</sup>) **(Click for full sermon by J C Ryle on Regeneration)**

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A few years ago when I was in Northfield, Massachusetts, to conduct evangelistic services, I visited [Roundtop" where D. L. Moody is buried](#). As I knelt in prayer, I recalled vividly Mr. Moody's eloquent words:

"Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall have gone up higher; that is all; out of this old clay tenement, into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever."

Mr. Moody was right. And I expect to meet him one day in a glorified body that will never die. - George Sweeting

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From the Canons of Dordt (1618, 1619)

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's work in conversion. Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, or works true conversion in them, he not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Article 12: Regeneration a supernatural work. And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvellous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvellous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received, is also rightly said to believe and to repent.

Article 14: The way God gives faith. In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for man to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on man, breathed and infused into him. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent—the act of believing—from man's choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that he who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people produces in man both the will to believe and the belief itself.

Article 16: Regeneration's effect. However, just as by the fall man did not cease to be man, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back. As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. It is in this that the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consists. Thus, if the marvellous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, man would have no hope of getting up from his fall by his free choice, by which he plunged himself into ruin when still standing upright.

Article 17: God's use of means in regeneration. Just as the almighty work of God by which he brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise his power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give him the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what he in his good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is and the better his work advances. To him alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed for ever. Amen.

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What do regular coffee, acoustic guitars, and black-and-white television have in common? All are what journalist Frank Mankiewicz calls "**retronyms**"—words or phrases created because a familiar word needs to be distinguished from a term that refers to a new development or invention. Once, all coffee was regular, all guitars were acoustic, and all TVs were black and white. Not so today, thus the need for a growing list of retronyms, including decaf mocha java, electric guitar, and high-def television. It could be said that Jesus turned the phrase **physical birth** into a **retronym** when He told an inquiring man named Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

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**Confession of Faith of the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales (1823)**

**26. Of regeneration.**

Regeneration consists in a gracious and supernatural change, wrought by the Spirit of God in all those who are saved to eternal life, by making them partakers of the divine nature, which is the principle of a holy life, effectually working in the whole man, and for that reason called 'the new man'. The holy nature received in regeneration acts in all those who are made partakers of it in direct opposition to every form of corruption, and after God who created it. This change produces in the whole man a lively impress of God's holiness, as a child bears the image of his father. God alone is the author of this change. It is generally wrought by means of the word, and is set forth in Scripture under several names; such as quickening, forming Christ in the heart, partaking of the divine nature, and circumcising the heart. This change is wrought in order that men may glorify God by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and purifying the soul, so as to be meet to enjoy fellowship with God for ever.

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"O Lord," muttered Alexander Pope one day, "make me a *better* man!" His spiritually-enlightened servant replied, "It would be easier to make you a *new* man!" (A Frank Boreham Treasury)

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**Warren Wiersbe on Born Again** - Every great nation in history has become decadent and has finally been conquered by another nation. There is no reason why we should suppose that our nation will be an exception. Some nineteen world civilizations, in the past, have slipped into oblivion. There is no reason why we should think that our present civilization will endure forever. "Change and decay in all around I see," wrote Henry F. Lyte (1793-1847), and if our civilization is not eroded by change and decay it will certainly be swept away and replaced by a new order of things at the coming of Christ, which could happen at any time. Slowly but inevitably, and perhaps sooner than even Christians think, the world is passing away; but the man who does God's will abides forever. Long after this world system, with its vaunted culture, its proud philosophies, its egocentric intellectualism, and its godless materialism, has been forgotten, and long after this planet has been replaced by the new heavens and the new earth, God's faithful servants will remain—sharing the glory of God for all eternity. And this prospect is not limited to Moody, Spurgeon, Luther, or Wesley and their likes—it is open to each and every humble believer. If you are trusting Christ, it is for you. (Pause for Power: A Year in the Word)

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**Mutiny on the Bounty** ([Mutiny on the Bounty - Wikipedia](#)) - In 1789, a group of mutineers put their officers on a longboat, took control of the H.M.S. Bounty, and sailed to Tahiti to enjoy a comfortable life. Fearing punishment, some of them, along with several Polynesians, later moved to uninhabited [Pitcairn Island](#) and burned the ship so there would be no evidence. Despite the South Pacific paradise-like setting, sexual immorality, jealousy, anger, alcohol, and disease took their toll until there was only one Englishman, ten women, and many children left. The remaining Englishman, Alexander Smith (See [John Adams \(mutineer\) = Alexander Smith](#)), discovered a Bible in the ship's goods, and thankfully, the next-to-last man had taught him to read before he died. Smith studied the Word, decided it held the answer to the community's problems, and initiated Sunday worship and daily prayer times for the remaining people. In 1808, an American ship happening upon the island was surprised to discover a thriving group of 35 English-speaking Christians. **The power of Scripture can transform lives!** As we learn in today's reading, the Word has an important role to play in spiritual rebirth and sanctification. The reading begins with a moral imperative found throughout the New Testament: "**Love one another deeply from the heart.**" This should be the natural (**Ed**: I would suggest "supernatural") result of purity and obedience (1Pe 1:22). This pursuit of holiness and love should in turn spring (supernaturally) from our salvation, which is linked with the message of salvation, the Gospel (1Pe 1:23; James 1:18). Being born again is a spiritual and eternal event (John 3:5-6), and the Bible is a spiritual and eternal revelation. Much more than a "good book," it is the "living and enduring word of God," as Isaiah had also proclaimed (1Pe 1:23-25). After being spiritually reborn, we are to "grow up" in our salvation (1Pe 2:2), progressing from spiritual infancy to maturity, as displayed in increasing love and righteousness. Our motive is greater intimacy with God (1Pe 2:3; cf. Ps. 34:8. TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Born again" is a popular phrase, but not everyone knows what it means. Do you? It means that when a person trusts in Jesus for salvation from sin, he or she essentially starts a new life as a new person. But without that trust, the Bible says you are "dead in your sins" (Col. 2:13). There's nothing you can do to save yourself. If you've never trusted in Jesus, let today be the start of your new life! (**Today in the Word**)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Years ago, Bishop John Taylor Smith, a former chaplain general of the British army, was preaching in a large cathedral on the text, "You must be born again." He said, "My dear people, do not substitute anything for the new birth. You may be a member of a church ... but church membership is not new birth, and 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" The rector was sitting on his left. Pointing to him he said, "You may be a clergyman like my friend the rector here and not be born again, and 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" On his right sat the archdeacon. Pointing at him, he continued, "You might even be an archdeacon like my friend here and still not be born again, but 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" You might even be a bishop like myself and not be born again, but 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

Several days later he received a letter from the archdeacon which read, in part, "My dear Bishop: You have found me out. I have been a clergyman for over 30 years, but I have never known anything of the joy that Christians speak of. I never could understand

it... But when you pointed at me and said that a person could be an archdeacon and not be born again, I understood what the trouble was. Would you please come and talk with me?" Of course, Bishop Smith did talk with him and the archdeacon responded to Christ's call to salvation (H. A. Ironside, Illustrations of Biblical Truth)

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JOHN 3:3—Does being “born again” indicate that Jesus taught reincarnation?

**PROBLEM:** Traditionally, Christians have believed that the Bible does not teach the doctrine of reincarnation (cf. Heb. 9:27). However, many groups use this verse to claim that Jesus taught that it was necessary to be reincarnated.

**SOLUTION:** What Jesus is teaching in this passage is not reincarnation, but regeneration. This is clear from several facts. First, the doctrine of reincarnation teaches that, after a person dies, he enters another mortal body to live on this earth again. This process repeats itself over and over in a virtually endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth into yet another mortal body. If Jesus were advocating reincarnation, He should have said, “unless someone is born again and again and again and again...”

Second, the doctrine of reincarnation teaches that people die over and over until they reach perfection (Nirvana). However, the Bible clearly teaches that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

Third, in the verses that follow, Jesus explains what He means by being born again. Jesus says, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Although there are commentators who differ on exactly what this “water” means (see comments on John 3:5), they are all agreed that it cannot possibly refer to reincarnation. Being born again, then, is being cleansed from our sins, and being given the life of God by the Spirit of God (Rom. 3:21–26; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). (Norman Geisler - When Critics Ask)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - The Greek historian Herodotus said that the ancient Egyptians believed in the new birth. They believed that when a person died they became whatever animal happened to have been born at the same time, and then they went from that animal to another animal life and then to another animal's life until they had gone through all of the animals of the animal kingdom, and then the Egyptians believed that you could be born again, that's what they called it, born again as a human being, and they believed the process would take 3,000 years. Really, they believed in [reincarnation](#) and they believed in a lie!

## "COUNTERFEIT NEW BIRTH" WHAT THE NEW BIRTH IS NOT

This excerpt is from **Gary Brady's** excellent little (174 page) 2008 paperback book entitled [What the Bible Teaches About Being Born Again \(digital edition for Logos\)](#) . I highly recommend this book whether you are a lay person or seminary trained as it is very readable, but absolutely Biblical. Given the importance of this subject in time and eternity, the new birth is one "theological subject" regarding which we do not want to be "fuzzy" in our thinking.

Brady discusses what the new birth is not...what I have chose to call "counterfeit new births."

### (1) Not a cross-generational reincarnation

The story is told of a keen young Christian witnessing to his Hindu neighbour. At one point he says to him, ‘You see, what needs to happen is that you have to be born again!’ The Hindu believes in the transmigration of souls, or metempsychosis, the idea that after death the soul begins a new life in another body, so he answers, ‘But, my dear friend, I've been born again many times!’ More than one Hindu book aimed at westerners has commended the idea of being born again and again.

The recognition of the need for renewal is good but the theory is riddled with difficulties. Hindus and others sometimes refer to reincarnation as regeneration but when the Bible speaks of it, this is not what it means. Christian regeneration or rebirth is something that occurs in this life not in any future one! (**Related Resource:** [What does the Bible say about reincarnation?](#))

### (2) Not a continuous process

In 1889 an American couple, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, founded the Unity Church. Now two million strong, it works in fifteen countries promoting so-called ‘practical Christianity’. Among its distinctives is a notion that being born again is a continuous process that needs to be repeated. The idea is clearly attractive to some but, in Scripture, new birth happens once and for all; it is not a process. It is a fountain not a river; the ignition of

the engine not its continuous hum; birth not growth. (**Related Resource:** [What is the Unity Church / Unity School of Christianity?](#))

### (3) Not a renewal of the spirit apart from the soul

Another understanding of the new birth we should warn against is one that arises out of the view that man is made up of three parts not two (spirit, soul and body, not just soul and body). It is sometimes assumed that sin resides only in the soul, the spirit remaining pure. Once the soul is renewed, the proper balance is regained and the body will follow suit. Whatever view we take of man's composition (trichotomy, dichotomy; three parts or two), to deny our utter depravity—body, soul, spirit, mind, heart—is a serious mistake and is bound to lead us astray.

### (4) Not a material change

Before his conversion, Augustine of Hippo was involved in a religious movement called Manichaeism. It began in Persia in the third century AD and among its teachings, according to later theologians, was the erroneous view that regeneration is a change in substance. Others have held similar views. A sixteenth-century Lutheran called Illyricus taught that in regeneration a substance called original sin is replaced by another substance. In fact, no addition to or subtraction from the soul is involved.

In the seventeenth century, as noted, some Reformed theologians do refer to regeneration as something physical but in using this term they were not suggesting there is a material change. Rather, this was their way of referring to a change in nature (phusis). (**Related Resource:** [What is Manichaeism?](#))

### (5) Not a simple choice

Back in the second half of the fourth century, there was a monk called [Pelagius](#) who initially lived somewhere in the British Isles. He and his followers believed that sin is only a matter of making wrong choices. A man can choose to sin. A man can choose not to sin. Being born again is chiefly a matter of choosing not to sin. It is an 'act of the soul', a mere reformation of life and habit. The person who once chose to break God's law, now chooses to obey it.

Pelagius's sub-biblical form of Christianity was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431 but later groups have taught similar things. Most common are those who, like Pelagius's contemporary John Cassian, are Semi-Pelagian. In the seventeenth century [Jacobus Arminius](#) and his followers ([Arminians](#)) blazed a trail in this direction. They accept the need for the Spirit to work but taught that he can be resisted and that regeneration can be lost. (Related Resources: [What is Pelagianism?](#) [What is semi-Pelagianism?](#))

In the nineteenth century, the American evangelist and theologian [Charles Finney](#) taught that regeneration is, to quote a sermon of his, 'a voluntary change in the governing preference of the mind, or a change of choice'. More recently, the popular American writer [Joyce Meyer](#) has produced a book called *The most important decision you will ever make*. It claims to teach you 'what you must believe to be born again'. The very title of the book suggests an inadequate view of the subject.

**COMMENT BY JUSTIN TAYLOR** - In an article entitled, "[The Legacy of Charles Finney](#)," Michael Horton traces how Finney rejected original sin, a substitutionary atonement, the **supernatural character of the new birth**, and justification by grace alone through faith alone. Horton concludes that Finney **'is not only an enemy of evangelical Protestantism, but of historic Christianity of the broadest sort.'**

The truth is that all sorts of people make a fresh start or a new beginning. Turning over a new leaf can be a good thing as far as it goes, but it is not at all what the Bible means when it talks of regeneration or being born again. We need a far more comprehensive change, a transformation that only new birth can bring about. Our need is not to make a new start in life but to receive a new life to start with.

Charles Naylor put it well, back in 1907:

No mere reformation your sins can erase,  
You cannot remove their stain;  
If ever in heaven your soul has a place,  
You must be born again.

Whitewashing walls is not enough.  
The whole house needs to be reconstructed.

### (6) Not a fresh commitment

Surveys in the USA often reveal a high percentage of individuals claiming to be 'born again'. On further examination, it is evident that many simply mean that at some point, often in their teens, they made some sort of Christian commitment. They went forward at an evangelistic rally, or prayed a prayer of commitment alone or with someone else. They made an emotional response to God in a personal crisis or after watching a religious film, or signed a decision card. Perhaps you have done something similar yourself.

Such acts and responses may accompany Christian conversion but are again not something that we can equate with regeneration. [Charles Finney](#) fostered this sort of thinking and many have copied him. The first page of his Lectures on Revivals declares, disturbingly, his belief that 'religion is the work of man'. A modern book aimed at teenagers sets out its understanding of the gospel and gives a model prayer to pray. It then says, 'If you sincerely prayed that prayer, you are now born again.' This can only be true if we regard new birth merely as a commitment, rather than taking a biblical view of the subject.

Contemporary Presbyterian theologian Jay E. Adams' booklet [Decisional Regeneration](#) warns against this sort of misunderstanding. He points out that Charlotte Elliott's 1836 hymn 'Just as I am', often used when ['altar calls'](#) are given, was written with invalids in mind. Bedridden herself, Elliott did not equate the words 'I come, I come' with a walk down an aisle or across a sports field; nor should we. The coming in mind is the heart's response following its renewal by God.

### (7) Not a moving experience

A 1970s love song by David Shire and Carol Connors includes the line, 'Woman, don't you know, with you I'm born again.' On a web site, singer Michael Jackson is quoted describing his conversion to Islam with the words, 'I felt as if I were born again.' It is perhaps this understanding of the term that leads some [Mormons](#), members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, to describe themselves as 'born again'. American novelist Gore Vidal provocatively described himself as 'a born-again atheist' and others have similarly declared themselves 'born-again sceptics' or 'born-again cynics'!

Though people equate being born again with 'feeling brand new' and sometimes speak of falling in love and other emotional upheavals in such terms, when the Bible speaks about being born again it is not speaking about a moving experience.

In 1721, [Thomas Boston](#) pointed out how 'a person may have sharp soul-exercises and pangs and yet, as it were, *'die in the birth'* (See Boston's original article - [Regeneration](#)). Not all that glitters is gold and spring blossom cannot guarantee summer fruit. Sharp convictions can 'go off'. **Awakening grace is not converting grace.** Some 'stillborns' (or [almost Christians](#), [Ryle](#)) make the mistake of thinking that having a deep conviction of sin is enough. To receive the Word with joy is not to be born again (Matthew 13:20+).

People of many different religious backgrounds, and even some with none at all, use regeneration language to describe moving experiences, but this is not what we are talking about here.

### (8) Not a change of opinion

Some theologians have seen regeneration as the discovery of one's potential divinity, an ethical change that led to following higher principles. More recently, under post-modern influences, professing evangelicals in the 'emergent church' have been saying similar things. Steve Chalke, for example, seems to understand Christ's call to regeneration simply as a call to see the world differently and adopt a new agenda. It is to discover, he says, the freedom found in God's love and rule. Brian McLaren similarly sees no need for the Holy Spirit to bring it about. Such thinking is unbiblical. (**Related Resource:** [Kevin Deyoung on Brian McLaren](#))

### (9) Not a psychological effect

William James, brother of novelist Henry, was a philosopher and psychologist. Like other writers on religious experience, he wanted to dismiss all idea of the new birth being supernatural. He saw it as something psychological occurring in the subconscious, in which a person moves from a self-centred (auto-centric) standpoint to a hetero-centric one, focused elsewhere.

He writes of how a self that has been 'divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy' becomes 'unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold on religious realities'. As we have suggested, even some professing Christians hold similar views but this is not what the Bible teaches.

### (10) Not a consequence of baptism



Since the post-apostolic period many have taught 'baptismal regeneration'—the spiritual rebirth of a baby at baptism. That a baby could be regenerated at the time of baptism is not disputed, but that it happens because of baptism is. (**Related Resources:** [What is baptismal regeneration? Is baptism necessary for salvation?](#))

Roman Catholicism teaches that baptism not only cancels the guilt of any actual sin and any punishment due as a result of it, but it also removes the power of original (inherited) sin to defile and corrupt. Baptism renews the moral nature and the subject becomes a son and heir of God. It is believed that this happens every time an infant is baptized but that adults can resist baptism's virtue or make it invalid.

Lutherans and Anglicans often see regeneration at baptism as the norm. The Anglican baptismal service says of the baptized baby, 'This child is regenerate.' It has pleased God to 'regenerate the infant'. Some say it is a judgement of charity but others suggest that a germ of spiritual life is planted in the soul that may long remain dormant until it bears fruit or eventually withers and dies.

Some allow for both biblical regeneration and 'baptismal regeneration', which they see as a change in a person's state or relation so that he is in some sense, 'a son of God'. Both acts, they say, are the work of the Spirit.

The Prayer Book is a problem for Bible-believing Anglicans. In 1864, C. H. Spurgeon, a Baptist, opposed baptismal regeneration as it was not taught by God and was not found anywhere in the Bible. In the same period, Anglican theologian J. B. Mozley agreed. 'Scripture nowhere asserts, either explicitly or implicitly, the regeneration of infants in baptism,' he wrote. (See [Infant Baptism](#))

Others directly connect the water baptism of older people with rebirth in ways the Bible never does. Regardless of vain appeals to 1 Peter 3:21 or John 3:3, baptism is an act of obedience and cannot produce regeneration. Simon Magus was baptized but he was no true convert (see Acts 8). Isaac Watts reminds us:

Not all the outward forms on earth,  
Nor rites that God has given,  
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,  
Can raise a soul to heaven.

#### **(11) Not a result of confirmation or community**

In a similar way, some speak of a service of confirmation into the church or of church membership as regeneration. It is true that all who are born again are members of the universal church. Simply joining a local church or having someone's hands laid on your head, however, cannot produce the biblical new birth. (**Related Resource:** [What does the Bible say about Christian confirmation?](#))

In the nineteenth century German modernist Friedrich Schleiermacher spoke more complexly of regeneration being produced in a person by the common Christian spirit of the community. Again, this is not what Scripture is speaking about when it refers to this matter.

As Boston says, one may be civil and sober and even follow all the outward duties of religion without ever being regenerate ([See under "Of the Nature of Regeneration - #3 "civility and sobriety"](#)). We may be very strict in these things, like Paul the Pharisee, 'yet be strangers to the new birth'.

#### **(12) Not a denominational matter**

The ancient Persian religion of [Mithraism](#) described initiation into its mysteries as 'regeneration'. In Christianity, there are no hidden mysteries of that sort. All are free to know what we teach. Regeneration cannot, therefore, be anything like this.

'Born-again Christians' can be found in different Christian denominations and groupings. As far as we are aware, there is no 'born-again Christian' denomination, though some churches use the words 'new birth' in their names. Even if there is a 'born-again' denomination, or if one came into existence, regeneration could not be a matter of joining such a group. Simply joining a group or signing up to a confession, whatever its name, cannot of itself regenerate anyone. Churches and creeds do not make Christians.

#### **(13) Not an American thing**

Another idea is that '*born-again Christian*' is just a phrase that certain American Christians, or rather vocal and enthusiastic Christians elsewhere, like to use. In fact, though Americans have invented many wonderful things, from chewing gum to manned flight, being born again is not one of them.

It is true that the influence of Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians from the USA is great. It is true that go-getting American attitudes affect Christians as well as others. It is also true that in the seventies there was something of a 'born-again movement' in the USA. In 1976, presidential candidate and later president Jimmy Carter described himself in interviews as 'born again' and Charles Colson, converted Watergate felon, brought out his top-selling autobiography *Born again*. In 1977 American evangelist Billy Graham produced his best-seller *How to be Born Again*.

However, to suggest that being born again is a simple matter of being an American or belonging to a certain movement is unfair and incorrect.

**Steven Cole** makes a good point writing that "We live in a culture which has taken some biblical words and used them in a way that redefines and cheapens them so that they no longer mean what the Bible means. But then they seep back into the vocabulary of Christians with their devalued meaning. Take the term "**born again**." The media uses it to describe anyone who makes a comeback or gets a fresh start in life. A baseball team that has been in the cellar and suddenly starts winning is called "**the born again**" Dodgers. Chrysler under Lee Iacocca was a "**born again**" corporation. And so it's not surprising when over 50 percent of Americans say that they're "**born again Christians**." They mean that they had some sort of religious or emotional experience that resulted in a fresh start in life. It may have involved praying to Jesus or "inviting Him into their hearts." But in most cases, they have no idea what the Bible means by being born again. ([Sermon](#)) (Bolding added)

#### (14) Not a form of justification or conversion

We will look at how regeneration relates to other aspects of salvation later. Here it is worth noting, however, that in the early years after Christ, Christian writers spoke of regeneration in quite general terms. For example, they did not distinguish justification by faith and the new birth. The two are still confused in Roman Catholic thinking today. Over the centuries, others have defined the terms in narrower and more biblical ways, especially since the Reformation.

Augustine grasped the importance of seeing new birth as an irresistible work of God but was not as clear as later writers. With Martin Luther things improved, but even the Reformer John Calvin did not distinguish regeneration from conversion and the ongoing work of sanctification. Later Protestant theologians saw things more clearly, but we often find them lumping conversion and regeneration together.

Today, although some good writers still use the word 'regeneration' to speak of the effects of new birth rather than the change itself, the best writers rightly confine terms such as born again and regeneration to the very specific matter of the way God changes a person's heart at the beginning of the Christian life.

#### (15) Not a simple acceptance of the Bible

Perhaps a final thing to say is that being born again is not a matter of simply believing the Bible. A good Bible knowledge cannot guarantee anything. It is important that we accept the Bible as God's Word, of course, including what it says on regeneration. However, new birth involves something more than accepting that the Bible is true.

Agreeing with its ethical teachings, as set out in the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, is not enough either. Simply conforming to rules and regulations cannot make a person a born-again Christian. As we will see, something more is needed.

To sum up then, regeneration is not a cross-generational reincarnation, a continuous process nor a renewal of the spirit but not the soul. It is not a material change. It is not a simple choice, a fresh commitment, a moving experience, a change of opinion or something psychological. It is not a consequence of baptism, of confirmation or community membership or of joining a certain denomination. It is not an American 'thing' either and we must not confuse it with conversion or justification or a simple acceptance of the Bible.

Whether you yourself are born again or not, if you have thought of regeneration in any of these ways then you need to realize your mistake and repent. Ask the Lord to help you to distinguish biblical new birth from its many counterfeits.

- Recommended Reading - [What the Bible Teaches About Being Born Again \(digital edition for Logos\)](#)

## QUOTES FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

The two greatest days in a person's life are the day he was born and the day he finds out why he was born. (And then is born again!)

Repentance is a change of the mind and regeneration is a change of the man. Thomas Adams

Nature forms us; sin deforms us; school informs us; Christ transforms us.

Conversion is a deep work—a heart-work. It goes throughout the man, throughout the mind, throughout the members, throughout the entire life. Joseph Alleine

Conversion is no repairing of the old building; but it takes all down and erects a new structure. Joseph Alleine

Everything that is born of God is no shadowy work. God will not bring forth a dead fruit, a lifeless and powerless work, but a living, new man must be born from the living God. JOHANN ARNDT

Man is not converted because he wills to be, but he wills to be because he is ordained to election. Augustine

Regeneration is the fountain; sanctification is the river. J. Sidlow Baxter

Seeing we are born God's enemies we must be new-born his sons. Richard Baxter

Despair of ever being saved, "except thou be born again," or of seeing God "without holiness," or of having part in Christ except thou "love him above father, mother, or thy own life." This kind of despair is one of the first steps to heaven. Richard Baxter

Becoming a Christian is not making a new start in life; it is receiving a new life to start with. John Blanchard

Take away the mystery from the new birth and you have taken away its majesty. John Blanchard

Man's basic need is not a grasp of logic but the gift of life. John Blanchard

Regeneration is God's mysterious prerogative. John Blanchard

The new birth is infinite in its beginning because its beginning lies in infinity. John Blanchard

The new birth is not only a mystery that no man can understand, it is a miracle that no man can undertake. John Blanchard

No human birth can compare to the supernatural birth of a child of God. James M Boice

I remember this, that everything looked new to me... the fields, the cattle, the trees. I was like a new man in a new world. Billy Bray

Conversion is not the smooth, easygoing process some men seem to think it otherwise man's heart would never have been compared to fallow ground and God's Word to a plough. John Bunyan

The egg's no chick by falling from the hen,  
Nor man a Christian till he's born again. - John Bunyan

Faith does not proceed from ourselves, but is the fruit of spiritual regeneration. John Calvin

True conversion is proved by the constant tenor of the life. John Calvin

We... are born lions, tigers, wolves and bears, until the Spirit of Christ tames us, and from wild and savage beasts forms us to be mild sheep. John Calvin

When God designs to forgive us he changes our hearts and turns us to obedience by his Spirit. John Calvin

In the conversion of man, the properties of our original nature remain entire. John Calvin

Men by their own free will cannot turn to God until he first change their stony hearts into hearts of flesh. John Calvin

In the natural world it is impossible to be made all over again, but in the spiritual world it is exactly what Jesus Christ makes possible. Oswald Chambers

You must be born again. This is not a command, it is a foundation fact. The characteristic of the new birth is that I yield myself so completely to God that Christ is formed in me. Oswald Chambers

Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration the nature of sons. Stephen Charnock

Regeneration is a spiritual change; conversion is a spiritual motion. Stephen Charnock

Regeneration is a universal change of the whole man... it is as large in renewing as sin was in defacing. Stephen Charnock

O Lord, convert the world—and begin with me. CHINESE STUDENT'S PRAYER

If Christ's lordship does not disrupt our own lordship, then the reality of our conversion must be questioned. Charles Colson

If the second birth hath no place in you, the second death shall have power over you. William Dyer

Conversion is but the first step in the divine life. As long as we live we should more and more be turning from all that is evil and to all that is good. Tryon Edwards

Regeneration, however it is described, is a divine activity in us, in which we are not the actors but the recipients. Sinclair Ferguson

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life. SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Regeneration is the communication of the divine nature to man by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word. A. J. Gordon

In one bold stroke, forgiveness obliterates the past and permits us to enter the land of new beginnings. Billy Graham

A transformed life is the greatest of all miracles. Every time a person is "born again" by repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ, the miracle of regeneration is performed. Billy Graham

Conversion is an empty-handed turning from sin to the Saviour. Vance Havner

It takes a radical break to turn from earth's trash to heaven's treasure. Vance Havner

We are born with our backs upon God and heaven, and our faces upon sin and hell, till grace comes and that converts—turns us. Philip Henry

Such is the degeneracy of human nature that there is no true wisdom to be found with any but those who are born again and who, through grace, partake of the divine nature. Matthew Henry

Regeneration is a single act, complete in itself, and never repeated; conversion, as the beginning of holy living, is the commencement of a series, constant, endless and progressive. A. A. Hodge

Whatever man may do after regeneration, the first quickening of the dead must originate with God. A. A. Hodge

The almighty power of God in the conversion of a sinner is the most mysterious of all the works of God. Thomas Hooker

Spiritual life is the consequence of spiritual quickening. The baby cries because it is born; it is not born because it cries. Erroll Hulse

If a man is as passionate, malicious, resentful, sullen, moody or morose after his conversion as before it, what is he converted from or to? John Angell James

God's work of regeneration is never directly perceived by the soul: it takes place in man within the region of what has now come to be called the subconscious. Ernest F. Kevan

When one is born of the Spirit one does not suddenly become perfect or even nearly so. Rather, one becomes exceedingly sinful in one's own estimation. That is to say, one comes under conviction of sin. R. B. Kuiper

Conversion requires an alteration of the will, and an alteration which, in the last resort, does not occur without the intervention of the supernatural. C. S. Lewis

To expect Christian conduct from a person who is not born again is rank heresy. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

We must not think of ourselves as ordinary people. We are not natural men; we are born again. God has given us his Holy Spirit. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

When God works in us, the will, being changed and sweetly breathed upon by the Spirit of God, desires and acts, not from compulsion, but responsively.

Martin Luther

When by the Spirit of God, I understood these words, "The just shall live by faith," I felt born again like a new man: I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God! Martin Luther

We cannot be changed by altering a few of our bad habits. Reformation will not do, for the disease of sin has captured our very life system. We need regeneration, a new heart. Will Metzger

Unless God changes a person's heart, nothing lasting will be achieved. Will Metzger

We must not make the mistake of thinking that people are converted because they follow our line of reasoning as we explain the gospel. Will Metzger

If you have been born of the Holy Spirit, you will not have to serve God . . . it will become the natural thing to do. D. L. Moody

Man is born with his back toward God. When he truly repents, he turns right around and faces God. Repentance is a change of mind. . . . Repentance is the tear in the eye of faith. D. L. Moody

The genesis of Christianity as an experience is that of being born again of the Spirit. G. Campbell Morgan

Just as in the beginning 'God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light' so, at the moment he appointed for our new birth, he said, 'Let there be life' and there was life. J. A. Motyer

We are helpless to co-operate in our regeneration as we are to co-operate in the work of Calvary. Iain H. Murray

Whenever a profession of conversion is not accompanied by holiness of life it must be understood that the person concerned is not yet a Christian. Iain H. Murray

Let them pretend what they please, the true reason why any despise the new birth is because they hate a new life. John Owen

Regeneration has made our hearts a battle field. J. I. Packer

Sinners cannot obey the gospel, any more than the law, without renewal of heart. J. I. Packer

(New Birth) An inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit. J. I. Packer

There is no regeneration without spiritual activities. J. I. Packer

If regeneration is a work of new creation, sanctification is a work of new formation. If regeneration is a new birth, sanctification is a new growth. J. I. Packer

Regeneration is the transforming not only of an unlovely object, but of one that resists with all its might the gracious designs of the heavenly Potter. A. W. Pink

True conversion is the heart turning from Satan's control to God's, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. A. W. Pink

The regenerate have a spiritual nature within that fits them for holy action, otherwise there would be no difference between them and the unregenerate. A. W. Pink

I found that I was not only converted, but I was invaded. Eugenia Price

The act of God in our regeneration is so momentous that no single category of thought is sufficient to describe the changes it brings about in and for us. Maurice Roberts

Grace does not run in families. It needs something more than good examples and good advice to make us children of God. J. C. Ryle

If you are never born again, you will wish you had never been born at all. J. C. Ryle

The surest mark of true conversion is humility. J. C. Ryle

"You may be saved, and reach heaven without many things which men reckon of great importance — without riches, without learning, without books, without worldly comforts, without health, without house, without land, without friends — but without Regeneration you will never be saved at all." J.C. Ryle

No salvation without regeneration - no spiritual life without a new birth - no heaven without a new heart. J. C.

Ryle

We must be careful that we do not interpret the words "which were born" as if the new birth was a change which takes place in a man after he has believed in Christ, and is the next step after faith. Saving faith and regeneration are inseparable. The moment that a man really believes in Christ, however feebly, he is born of God. The weakness of his faith may make him unconscious of the change, just as a new-born infant knows little or nothing about itself. But where there is faith there is always new birth, and where there is no faith there is no regeneration. J. C. Ryle

There are no still-born children in the family of grace. William Secker

Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, If he's not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn. Johannes Scheffler

A dead man cannot assist in his own resurrection. W. G. T. Shedd

Before Christ could marry us he must be born in our nature, for the husband and the wife must be of one nature. Richard Sibbes

Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, If he's not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn. Angelus Silesius

The very first and indispensable sign of regeneration is self-loathing and abhorrence. Charles Simeon

A person is never partially born. He is either regenerate or he is not regenerate. R. C. Sproul

Every generation needs regeneration. C. H. Spurgeon

True conversion gives a man strength and holiness, but it never lets him boast. C. H. Spurgeon

When the Word of God converts a man, it takes away from him his despair, but it does not take from him his repentance. C. H. Spurgeon

Regeneration is a change which is known and felt: known by works of holiness and felt by a gracious experience. C. H. Spurgeon

The new creation is as much and entirely the work of God as the old creation. C. H. Spurgeon

When Christ came into my life I came about like a well-handled ship. Robert Louis Stevenson

We are not truly converted if we are not intellectually and morally converted, and we are not intellectually and morally converted if we have not subjected our minds and our wills to the yoke of Jesus Christ. John R. W. Stott

God regenerates the soul by uniting it to Jesus Christ. Augustus H. Strong

Regeneration is a restoration of the original tendencies towards God which were lost by the Fall. Augustus H. Strong

Regeneration is essentially a changing of the fundamental taste of the soul. By taste we mean the direction of man's love, the bent of his affections, the trend of his will. Augustus H. Strong

Someone else, describing his new life in Christ, said, "Everything seems new—the Bible, my friends, my love for others, even Sunday itself. I have a new desire for spiritual things, a desire to know more about God and His church." George Sweeting

We must begin by acknowledging that we need God's help, God's power, and God's life. Dead things cannot grow; and without Christ, we are spiritually dead. We are powerless and defeated. George Sweeting

The sense of newness is simply delicious. It makes new the Bible, and friends, and all mankind, and love, and spiritual things, and Sunday, and church, and God Himself. So I've found. TEMPLE GARDNER OF CAIRO

Regeneration gives our birth a value and our death a glory. David Thomas

Mere outward reformation differs as much from regeneration as white-washing an old rotten house differs from pulling it down and building a new one in its place. Augustus M. Toplady

Conversion for the early New Testament Christians was not a destination; it was the beginning of a journey. A. W. Tozer

When I find someone who is settled down too snugly into this world and its system, I am forced to doubt

whether he has ever truly been born again. A. W. Tozer

There are two spirits abroad in the earth: the spirit that works in the children of disobedience and the Spirit of God. These two can never be reconciled in time or in eternity. The spirit that dwells in the once-born is forever opposed to the Spirit that inhabits the heart of the twice-born. A. W. Tozer

(New Birth) A supernatural work of God's Spirit, renewing and transforming the heart into the divine likeness. - Thomas Watson

Man's need can only be met by a new creation. Geoffrey B. Wilson

The change of a sinner's heart is as great a miracle as any Jesus Christ wrought on earth. Joseph Wilson

Before Christ, a man loves things and uses people; after Christ he loves people and uses things. Horace Wood

**John 3:4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"**

NET John 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?"

GNT John 3:4 λ γει πρ ς α τ ν [ ] Νικ δ ημος, Π ς δ ν α τ αι ν θ ρ ω π ο ς γ ε ν ν η θ ν αι γ ρ ω ν ν ; μ δ ν α τ αι ε ς τ ν κ ο ι λ α ν τ ς μ η τ ρ ς α τ ο δ ε τ ε ρ ο ν ε σ ε λ θ ε ν κ α γ ε ν ν η θ ν αι ;

NLT John 3:4 "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

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

ESV John 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

NIV John 3:4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

ASV John 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto 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?

CSB John 3:4 "But how can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked Him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

NKJ John 3:4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

NRS John 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

YLT John 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, 'How is a man able to be born, being old? is he able into the womb of his mother a second time to enter, and to be born?'

NAB John 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?"

NJB John 3:4 Nicodemus said, 'How can anyone who is already old be born? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born?'

GWN John 3:4 Nicodemus asked him, "How can anyone be born when he's an old man? He can't go back inside his mother a second time to be born, can he?"

BBE John 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, How is it possible for a man to be given birth when he is old? Is he able to go into his mother's body a second time and come to birth again?

- **How.** Job 4:17. Jn 4:11, 12. Jn 6:53, 60. 1 Co 1:18. 2:14.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NICODEMUS IS CONFUSED

There is some disagreement on what Nicodemus meant by his questions, so several comments are quoted. The reader will have to make up his or her own mind about the best way to interpret Nicodemus' questions.

**Steven Cole** notes that " It's difficult to understand what Nicodemus meant by this question. Obviously, he did not believe that Jesus was suggesting that a person go back to the womb and be reborn physically. **John MacArthur** (The Gospel According to Jesus [Zondervan], p. 40) thinks that Nicodemus was really saying, "I can't start all over. It's too late. I've gone too far in my religious system to start over. There's no hope for me if I must begin from the beginning." He says that Jesus was demanding that Nicodemus forsake everything he stood for, and Nicodemus knew it. That may be, but I think **D. A. Carson** may be more on target when he suggests that Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was talking about at all. His amazement (Jn 3:7) at Jesus' words that he must be born again may indicate a degree of bewilderment. In Jn 3:12 Jesus indicts him for not believing what He has just told him. So Carson says that Nicodemus' answer reflects incredulosity, which prompted him to answer with a crassly literalistic interpretation of what Jesus said to express a degree of scorn. **R. C. Sproul** (John [Reformation Trust], p. 38) goes so far as to suggest that Nicodemus was insulting Jesus by his reply: "What are you talking about? Are you suggesting that a man has to enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born? What a ridiculous idea that is." So Jesus (in verse 5) further explains verse 3 (In Jn 3:5-7)." ([Why Religion Can't Save You John 3:1-7](#))

**Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old?"** Obviously Nicodemus did not understand Jesus' question for he knew it was an impossibility to be born again as a baby. It is interesting that when Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again, he did not ask "why" but "how?" It is notable that Nicodemus' incredulous response is similar to the question of the Jews in John 2:20+ after Jesus had told them "**Destroy** this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (Jn 2:19+)

**J C Ryle** has an interesting comment on Nicodemus' response - The question of Nicodemus is precisely one of those which the natural ignorance of man in spiritual things prompts a person to ask. Just as the Samaritan woman, in the 4th chapter, put a carnal meaning on our Lord's words about "living water," and the Jews, in the 6th chapter, put a carnal meaning on the "bread of God," so Nicodemus puts a carnal meaning on the expression "born again."—There is nothing which the heart of man in every part and every age of the world is so slow to understand as the work of the Holy Ghost. Our minds are so gross and sensuous, that we cannot take in the idea of an inward and spiritual operation. Unless we can see things and touch things in religion we are slow to believe them.

**Kenneth Wuest** - Nicodemus reacts to this statement of Jesus, by asking how a man can be born again when he is old. By his second question, Nicodemus shows plainly that he does not understand Jesus to mean a second physical birth, for he says, "He is not able to enter the womb of his mother a second time and be born, is he?" The Greek text here includes a negative which the Greek includes in his question when he expects a negative answer. Nicodemus expected that kind of an answer from Jesus. The emphasis in his question is on the word "how." His question is not, "How can a man be born physically a second time?" but "how can a man be born again?" Nicodemus asks for a further explanation of Jesus' words regarding the new birth. This explanation is found in the words of Jesus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (Great Truths to Live By)

**Borchert** explains that "When Nicodemus heard Jesus' assertion that he should have a birth experience, however, his imagination apparently went into high gear, and he interpreted Jesus' birth statement as born "again" (anōthen). A birth other than that like his natural birth seems to have been beyond the thinking of Nicodemus. Birth for him apparently was limited to physical birth." (NAC-Jn)

**Lenski** has an interesting comment - These questions of Nicodemus have sometimes been misunderstood. This is not mere unspiritual denseness that is unable to rise above the idea of physical birth; nor rabbinical skill in disputation that tries to make Jesus' requirement sound absurd, which Jesus would never have answered as he did; nor hostility to the requirement of Jesus. Nicodemus simply puts the requirement laid down by Jesus into words of his own; and by doing this in the form of questions he indicates where his difficulty lies. He thus actually asks Jesus for further explanation and enlightenment, and Jesus gives him this. (Borrow [The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel](#))

**Bruce Barton** - These questions that focused solely on birth—whether spoken sincerely or sarcastically—show that Nicodemus did not perceive the spiritual intent of Jesus' words. He saw only the literal meaning and questioned its absurdity. But with all his learning he should have understood that God can and will give spiritual rebirth. The prophets had spoken about this spiritual regeneration (see Ezekiel 36:25–27; see also Jeremiah 31:31–34; Joel 2:28–32). (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

**Kenneth Gangel** - Do we understand this as a literal question or a figure of speech suggesting something like "I'm too old to change?" Since Nicodemus was still unaware that Jesus was speaking in the spiritual realm, I favor taking his response literally. The physical world is often unexplainable just like the spiritual world, and Jesus later used the wind as an example to make that point. A



person cannot respond to spiritual truth in natural ways. Though the metaphor may have changed somewhat, Nicodemus could have heard this message even before Jesus' public ministry began. John the Baptist had preached that the king was already in their midst, but they would not experience the kingdom just because they were children of Abraham. Jews had compelled Gentiles to be baptized in order to participate in the nation, and John warned them that the Jews needed the baptism of repentance. The rite of Jewish baptism for proselytes does not necessarily depict the new birth Jesus proclaimed. But it contained the idea of washing away one's old and defiled life in order to emerge as a new person. But Nicodemus could not make the connection; he was stuck on a physical wavelength. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - John](#))

**Tenney** - Nicodemus's reply may be interpreted in two ways. At first sight he appears to be quite materialistic in his attitude, thinking that Jesus was advocating the impossibility of a second physical birth. On the other hand, he may not have so understood Jesus' statement. Perhaps he meant, "How can a man whose habits and ways of thinking have been fixed by age expect to change radically?" Physical rebirth is impossible, but is spiritual change any more feasible? (Borrow [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Dods** makes an interesting point "Had our Lord said: 'Every Gentile must be born again,' he would have understood." As **Morris** says "There are references to proselytes who were admitted to the Jewish religion *as being like children newly born.*" (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#) page 214)

**Robertson** - Nicodemus was probably familiar with the notion of re-birth for proselytes to Judaism for the Gentiles, but not with the idea that a Jew had to be reborn. But "this stupid misunderstanding" (Bernard) of the meaning of Jesus is precisely what John represents Nicodemus as making.

**Gary Burge** - Nicodemus's second question (3:4) is either wistful ("Can human nature really be changed? Can we really start over?") or cynical ("And I should return to my mother's womb? I don't think so."). Above all it shows that Nicodemus is outside the kingdom and that he cannot penetrate its deeper truths. Thus Jesus must explain more fully (3:5-8). Divine birth is now explained as birth "of water and the Spirit." (Borrow [John - The NIV Application Commentary](#))

**Charles Swindoll** has a less commonly espoused interpretation of Nicodemus' questions - When Nicodemus heard the new requirement, "**must be born anōthen,**" he deliberately focused on the "**again**" nuance of the phrase. Perhaps with tongue in cheek, he stretched the image out of shape. Don't forget; this is no imbecile sitting across from Jesus. This is a brilliant theologian, skilled in the art of debate, addressing what he undoubtedly saw as a young upstart. His question said, in effect, "What a ludicrous proposition!" Jews in his day called Gentile converts to Judaism "*newborn children,*" a charming expression for those who had just begun their new life as "sons of the covenant" and heirs to the blessings of Abraham's offspring. Men were circumcised and all converts were baptized in water. Nicodemus didn't misunderstand Jesus' imagery; he objected to the notion that only Gentile converts can take part in the coming earthly kingdom under the Messiah. This would leave Jews—the very people God had preserved for Himself through the centuries (Ps 106:5; 135:4)—out of the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18-21). (Borrow [Insights on John](#) )

**He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"**- The grammar of this question calls for a negative response. Of course not! **Lenski** paraphrases Nicodemus as if he would say " "I know you cannot and do not mean that!" or, "That much I see." He clearly perceives that Jesus has in mind some other, far higher kind of birth." Nicodemus knew that literal physical birth a second time was an impossibility. Jesus is in effect backing Nicodemus into a corner. He knew Nicodemus like all Jews wanted to enter the Kingdom of God, and here it looked to Nicodemus as if Jesus were making entrance into the Kingdom of God something that could not be achieved by human effort. **MacArthur** agrees commenting that Jesus "was making entrance into the kingdom contingent on something that could not be obtained through human effort."

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## Too Late To Change?

Nicodemus said to [Jesus], "How can a man be born when he is old?" —John 3:4

Today's Scripture & Insight: John 3:1-8,13-16

There are sayings in many languages about the difficulty of changing long-established habits. In English, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." In French, "Ce n'est pas à un vieux singe qu'on apprend à faire la grimace" (You can't teach an old monkey how to pull a funny face). In Spanish, "El loro viejo no aprende a hablar" (An old parrot can't learn to speak).

When Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be "born again" to "see the kingdom of God," he replied, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:3-4). Professor and author Merrill Tenney suggests that Nicodemus was saying, in effect, "I acknowledge that a new birth is necessary, but I am too old to change. My pattern of life is set. Physical birth is out of the question and psychological rebirth seems even less probable . . . . Is not my case hopeless?" (Borrow [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

Jesus' reply included these words, "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" (v.16). That is the offer of new life and a new beginning for anyone, young or old.

Whatever our age or situation in life, with God's power, it's not too late to change. David C. McCasland [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Father, old habits are hard to break, new ones are harder to learn, and sometimes we don't want to do either. Thank You for Your faithfulness to continue teaching us new ways, Your ways.

Because God is powerful, change is possible.

### John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God

NET John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

GNT John 3:5 πεκρθη ησο ς, μν μν λγω σοι, νμ τις γεννηθ ξ δατος κα πνεματος, ο δ ναται εσελθε ν ε ς τ ν βασιλε αν το θεο .

NLT John 3:5 Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.

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

ESV John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

NIV John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

ASV John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!

CSB John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

NKJ John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

NRS John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

YLT John 3:5 Jesus answered, 'Verily, verily, I say to thee, If any one may not be born of water, and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the reign of God;

NAB John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

NJB John 3:5 Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit;

GWN John 3:5 Jesus answered Nicodemus, "I can guarantee this truth: No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.

BBE John 3:5 Jesus said in answer, Truly, I say to you, If a man's birth is not from water and from the Spirit, it is not possible for him to go into the kingdom of God.

- **Truly.** Jn 1:51.
- **Unless.** Mt 4:9.
- **born.** Jn 3:3. Is 44:3, 4. Ezek 36:25-27. Mt 3:11. Mk 16:16. Ac 2:38. Ep 5:26. Ti 3:4-7. 1 Pe 1:2. 3:21. 1 Jn 5:6-8.
- **of water.** Jn 1:33. 7:38. 13:10. Ps 119:9, 11. Ezek 36:25. Mk 16:16. Ac 1:5. 2:38. 8:36. 10:47. 11:16. 22:16. Ep 5:26. Ti 3:5. He 10:22. 1 Pe 1:23. 3:20. 2 Pe 3:5, 6. 1 Jn 5:6, 8. Rev 22:1, 17.

- **and.** Jn 1:13, 6:63. Mt 3:11. Mk 16:16. Ro 8:2. 1 Co 2:12, 6:11. 1 Jn 2:29, 5:1, 6-8.
- **Spirit.** Lk 1:17. Jn 6:63. Ezek 36:26, 27. Mt 3:16. 1 Co 15:45.
- **cannot enter.** Mt 5:20. John 18:3. 28:19. Lk 13:3, 5, 24. Acts 2:38. 3:19. Ro 14:17. 1 Co 6:9, 10. 2 Co 5:17, 18. Gal 6:15. Ep 2:4-10. 2 Th 2:13, 14.
- **the kingdom.** Jn 3:3. Mt 8:11, 12. 21:43.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NOT REFORMATION BUT RADICAL CONVERSION

**Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you - Truly, truly ([amen](#), [amen](#))** underscore the gravity of what follows and is used 3 times in this interchange Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:11. All three uses speak of the solemn affirmation of the truth that follows. **Truly, truly** is Jesus' seal of certainty regarding what He is going to say.

**Kenneth Gangel** says that Jesus' "second answer must have hit Nicodemus directly between his theological eyes. Verse 3 deals with the source of the new birth, and verse 5 talks about the process." Or as **James Montgomery Boice** puts it "Jesus first spoke of the source of the new birth. He now speaks of the means by which it occurs."

**Unless one is born of water and the Spirit** - Note that Jesus is saying essentially the same thing He said in John 3:3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God." In other words Jesus clearly parallels "**born again**" with "**born of water and the Spirit**." This is an important observation, because the phrase "**born of water and the Spirit**" has generate many interpretation regarding what Jesus meant by **water**. And because excellent expositors disagree with the interpretation of the meaning of **water** (see discussion below), it would be very easy to miss a crucial point that Jesus is clearly describing man's need for a supernatural birth. Let us not miss that crucial truth, probably the most significant truth in the entire New Testament, the truth that one must experience the **new birth**, be **born again**, be **born by water and the Spirit!** As they say [don't miss the forest for the trees!](#) With that caveat we can look at the assorted interpretations.

**Unless (ean me)** is literally "if not" and is translated except, unless (e.g., in Mt 5:20+). This conditional conjunction is used 4x in John 3 (Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:27) **Unless** is a critical conjunction. In English dictionaries "**unless**" means "except under the circumstances that; except on the condition that." Another says "**Unless** is defined as except something else happens." In this case that "something else" that must happen is that Nicodemus must be **born again**. It is not optional! There is no "Plan B!"

**Born** (1080) see preceding note on [gennao](#). All uses by John - Jn. 1:13; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:4; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:6; Jn. 3:7; Jn. 3:8; Jn. 8:41; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 9:19; Jn. 9:20; Jn. 9:32; Jn. 9:34; Jn. 16:21; Jn. 18:37; 1 Jn. 2:29; 1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Jn. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:4; 1 Jn. 5:18

What does **born of water** mean? The range of interpretations is wide and there is no clear consensus.

(1) This interpretation says that in using the phrase **born of water** Jesus was referring to **water baptism** or **Christian baptism** as we practice it today.

**Gangel** comments that "No less a scholar than Westcott argues for [baptismal regeneration](#) from a text like this. Borchert (NAC-Jn) and Luther do not, but they see the **water** as the act of baptism."

**Carson** has an excellent argument against this interpretation writing that "If water = baptism is so important for entering the kingdom, it is surprising that the rest of the discussion never mentions it again: the entire focus is on the work of the Spirit (v. 8), the work of the Son (vv. 14–15), the work of God himself (vv. 16–17), and the place of faith (vv. 15–16)....The Spirit plays a powerful role in John 14–16; 20:22, but there is no hint of baptism.....The entire view seems to rest on an unarticulated prejudice that every mention of water evoked instant recognition, in the minds of first-century readers, that the real reference was to baptism, but it is very doubtful that this prejudice can be sustained by the sources. Even so, this conclusion does not preclude the possibility of a secondary allusion to baptism" Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Constable** - According to this view spiritual birth happens only when a person undergoes water baptism and experiences regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Some advocates of this view see support for it in the previous reference to water baptism (1:26 and 33). However, Scripture is very clear that water baptism is a testimony to salvation, not a prerequisite for it (cf. 3:16, 36; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). In addition, this meaning would have had no significance for Nicodemus. He knew nothing of Christian baptism. Furthermore Jesus never mentioned water baptism again in clarifying the new birth to Nicodemus.

**Steven Cole** - Some think that it refers to Christian baptism. But Christian baptism didn't exist at that point. Jesus was trying to explain things to Nicodemus, not confuse him with a doctrine which he knew nothing about. Also, to teach that sprinkling water on an infant causes the new birth would be to say that religion saves a person, which is the opposite of what is being said here!

**J M Boice** - Unfortunately, this is not substantiated either by the text or by biblical theology. The text says nothing at all about baptism, and the Bible elsewhere teaches that no one is saved by any external rite of religion (1 Sam. 16:7; Rom. 2:28–29; Gal. 2:15, 16; 5:1–6). Baptism is a sign of what has already taken place, but it is not the agent by which it takes place. (Boice - The Gospel of John)

**Edwin Blum** - This view contradicts other Bible verses that make it clear that salvation is by faith alone; e.g., John 3:16, 36; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5. (Bible Knowledge Commentary)

**Kenneth Wuest** - Others interpret the word “water” as referring to the rite of **water baptism**. But we submit that this is pure eisegesis, reading into the text something that is not there. Surely, the word “water” in itself, does not include within its meaning the idea of baptism. Furthermore, the only proper recipient of water baptism is one who has already been born again, the new-birth preceding water baptism, not the rite preceding the new birth. Again, the question arises as to how such a supernatural change as regeneration produces, could be the result of a mere ceremony.

**MacArthur** - Others see in the phrase **born of water** a reference to **baptism**, either that of **John the Baptist**, or **Christian baptism**. But Nicodemus would not have understood Christian baptism (which did not yet exist) nor misunderstood John the Baptist's baptism. Nor would Jesus have refrained from baptizing people (Jn 4:2) if baptism were necessary for salvation. (See [John Commentary - What Does It Mean to be Born of Water and Spirit?](#))

**(2) Born of water** refers to **physical birth** and so those who favor this interpretation say Jesus is referring to **two births**, one natural (water) and the other supernatural (Spirit).

**D A Carson** argues against this interpretation writing that "The Greek construction does not favour two births here. Moreover the entire expression 'of water and the Spirit' cries out to be read as the equivalent of anōthen, 'from above', if there is genuine parallelism between v. 3 and v. 5, and this too argues that the expression should be taken as a reference to but one birth, not two." Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**John MacArthur** argues against this interpretation "Proponents of this view interpret the water as the amniotic fluid that flows from the womb just before childbirth. But it is not clear that the ancients described natural birth in that way. Further, the phrase born of water and the Spirit parallels the phrase “born again” in verse 3; thus, only one birth is in view." (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Constable** - They claim that Jesus was saying that natural birth is not enough. One must also experience supernatural birth to enter the kingdom. However this use of “water” is unique in Scripture. Moreover it assumes that **two births** are in view whereas the construction of the Greek phrase favors one birth rather than two. If two were in view, there would normally be a repetition of the preposition before the second noun.

**Steven Cole** - I used to think that “born of water” referred to physical birth, so that Jesus was responding to Nicodemus' question in Jn 3:4, “Your physical birth as a Jew, Nicodemus, is not enough. You must also be born spiritually.” The problem with that view is that Nicodemus probably would not have understood “water” in this way.

**Gary Burge** - The chief problem here is that this culture did not refer to natural birth as birth “by water” (although we may do so today, thinking of water as either amniotic fluid or semen). (Borrow [John - The NIV Application Commentary](#))

**Kenneth Wuest** - Some interpret the word “water” here as referring to human birth as coming in a sac of water, and this in contrast to the birth by the Spirit. But the question arises at once as to whether the Lord Jesus would waste words on such a self-evident truth to the effect that in order for a person to be born into the kingdom of God, he must first be brought into existence by being born physically. Furthermore, we learned that the particular Greek word used here by John, meaning “again,” has no reference to the physical birth as being a predecessor of the spiritual birth.

**J M Boice** - I heard this explanation first during my years in college. It is based on the fact that physical

birth is accompanied by the release of the embryonic fluid from the womb of the mother. If this were the proper explanation, Jesus would be saying that in order for a person to be saved he must first be born physically and then his physical birth must be followed by a spiritual birth. True as this may be, it does not seem to be the proper interpretation of the statement. For one thing, the word “water” is never used in this way elsewhere in Scripture. For another, a reference to the necessity of physical birth is so self-evident that the question arises whether Jesus would waste words in this fashion. The third and decisive problem with this view is that since Jesus was probably claiming that a person is born again by water as well as by the Spirit, if water refers to physical birth, this is simply not true. Physical birth is not part of the answer. (Boice - The Gospel of John)

**(3) Water** is to be understood as a **symbol for the Holy Spirit**. Thus the phrase could be translated “born of water, even the Spirit.” (Jn 7:37-39)

**Gangel** - "The Greek word *kai* translated here (and commonly) as and can also mean “even.” Proponents of this view bring in passages like John 7:37–39 to link water with the Spirit." (Ibid)

**Steven Cole** - Others say that “water” is a symbol for the Holy Spirit, so that both terms mean the same thing. This is Calvin’s view (p. 111): “*By water, therefore, is meant nothing more than the inward purification and invigoration which is produced by the Holy Spirit.*” He would translate **and** as, **that is**, which is sometimes the meaning.

**Colin Kruse** favors this interpretation - Spiritual regeneration alone, depicted with a double metaphor. Elsewhere in this Gospel water functions as a metaphor for the Spirit (cf. Jn 4:10, 13–15; 7:38), as it also does in places in the Old Testament (e.g. Ezek. 36:25–27). The expression ‘water and the Spirit’ is a hendiadys, a figure of speech using two different words to denote one thing, something suggested by the fact that both ‘water’ and ‘Spirit’ are anarthrous (without the article) and governed by the one preposition (ex hydatos kai pneumatatos, lit. ‘of water and spirit’). Jesus is saying that to enter the kingdom one must be born of water—that is, of the Spirit. This view is preferable because it is also supported by the fact that in this passage Jesus uses a number of parallel expressions which are all related to seeing and entering the kingdom: Jn 3:3: ‘born again/from above’; Jn 3:5: ‘born of water and the Spirit’; Jn 3:7: ‘born again/from above’; Jn 3:8: ‘born of the Spirit’. If all these expressions are in fact parallel and synonymous, then to be ‘born again/from above’ and to be ‘born of water and the Spirit’ mean the same as to be ‘born of the Spirit’. (TNTC-Jn)

**(4) Water** is to be understood as a symbol of the **Word of God**. Similar imagery can be found in other New Testament passages, specifically [Ep 5:26; 1Pe 1:23].

**Gangel** says "Texts like Titus 3:5 and Ephesians 5:26 which link **water** and the **Word** seem attractive here (Boice)."

**Steven Cole** - Others argue that “water” represents the Word of God (John 15:3; Eph. 5:26; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). But, would Nicodemus have understood it in this way?

**Kenneth Wuest** - Others interpret the word “water” here as referring to the Word of God, referring to Ephesians 5:26 where Paul speaks of the washing of water by the Word, and also to I Peter 1:23 where the apostle speaks of being born again by the Word of God. This is a possible interpretation, true in itself. But the question is, is that what Jesus meant here? If He did, would it not be more natural for Him to have used two symbols, namely, water and oil, or two actualities, namely, the Word and the Spirit.

**James Montgomery Boice** favors this interpretation - **Water** is also a metaphor for the written Word of God, the Bible. Thus, Ephesians 5:26 says that Christ gave himself for the church “to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” In 1 John the same author who composed the fourth Gospel distinguishes between the witnesses to Christ on earth of “the Spirit, the water and the blood” (1 John 5:8). Since he then goes on to speak of God’s written witness to the fact that salvation is in Christ, in this context the Spirit must refer to God’s witness within the individual, the blood to the historical witness of Christ’s death, and the water to the Scriptures. Psalm 119:9 declares, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” Jesus said, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). A related text is James 1:18, which actually cites the Scriptures as the channel through which the new birth takes place, although without using water as the metaphor. “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” When we see Christ’s words in this light, we see that God is here pictured as the Divine Begetter, the Father of his spiritual children, and we learn that the written Word of God together with the working of his

Holy Spirit is the means by which the new birth is accomplished. That is why the Bible tells us that it pleased God to save people by the foolishness of preaching, for people are reborn through the efforts of others who proclaim God's Word (Rom. 10:14–15; 1 Cor. 1:21). One more verse makes this even clearer: 1 Peter 1:23. It says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

**Constable** - Another popular view is that "water" refers to the written Word of God and "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit. This figurative use of "water" does exist in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 5:26), but it is uncommon in the Old Testament. It is unlikely that Nicodemus would have associated water with the Word of God, and it would have been unfair for Jesus to rebuke him for not having done so. This view, as the former one, also specifies two separate entities whereas the Greek text implies only one as the source of regeneration.

(5) Jesus used the phrase **born of water** to refer to **John the Baptist's baptism**. The idea in this interpretation is that being born of John's baptism is not enough, but that one had to also be born of the Spirit. This view is held by Tenney, Westcott, Godet, )." (Gangel)

**Carson** says that in this interpretation "Jesus is either saying that the **baptism of repentance**, as important as it is, must not be thought sufficient: there must be **Spirit-birth** as well; or, if Nicodemus refused to be baptized by the Baptist, Jesus is rebuking him and saying that he must pass through repentance-baptism ('water') and new birth ('Spirit')."

**Carson** then argues against this interpretation writing "The argument presupposes that John the Baptist was so influential at the time that a mere mention of water would conjure up pictures of his ministry. If so, however, the response of Nicodemus is inappropriate. If the allusion to the Baptist were clear, why should Nicodemus respond with such incredulity, ignorance and unbelief (3:4, 9–10, 12), rather than mere distaste or hardened arrogance? Even if John's baptism is mentioned in near contexts, the burden of these contexts is to stress the relative unimportance of his rite (Jn 1:23, 26; 3:23, 30). If John's baptism lies behind 'water' in 3:5, would not this suggest that Jesus was making the Baptist's rite a requirement for entrance into the kingdom, even though that rite was shortly to be superseded by Christian baptism? Moreover, as Dods sets out this proposed solution, it is assumed that Jesus is recognized as the Messiah who dispenses the Spirit, but it is far from clear that Nicodemus has progressed so far in his appreciation of Jesus." Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Constable** - Others have suggested that the "water" could be a reference to the repentance present in those who underwent John's water baptism and the "spirit" an allusion to the Holy Spirit. In this case, repentance as a change of mind is necessary as a prerequisite for salvation. According to advocates of this view Jesus was urging Nicodemus to submit to John's baptism as a sign of his repentance or at least to repent. The weakness of this view is that the connection between water and repentance is distant enough to cause misunderstanding. Nicodemus' response (v. 9) expressed lack of understanding. If the connection between water and John's baptism was that clear, he would not have responded this way. It would have been simpler for Jesus just to say "repentance" if that is what He meant. Repentance in the sense of the fruit of a mental change is not necessary for salvation since by that definition repentance is a work.

**Steven Cole** - Some say it refers to John the Baptist's baptism. This is a possible interpretation if Jesus was referring to what John's baptism signified, namely, repentance from his sins. In addition to the repentance of John's baptism, a person must receive what John predicted of Messiah, that He would baptize both with water and with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33). But that seems like a subtle meaning that Nicodemus may easily have missed.

**John Phillips** - In seeking to ascertain the Lord's meaning we must observe the law of historical propriety. We must ask ourselves, "What would Nicodemus understand by these words?" Obviously he would not read Christian baptism into them because the Lord had not yet instituted that ordinance nor would he do so for several years. Water and the Spirit. Who had been hammering at the conscience of Israel, seeking to prepare the people for the coming of king and kingdom, using those very two words? John the baptist, of course. Nicodemus would think at once of John's words, "I indeed baptize with water, but there comes one who will baptize you with the Spirit." That is the key to this otherwise cryptic statement. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Bible Knowledge Commentary:** The "water" refers to the repentance ministry of John the Baptist, and

the “Spirit” refers to the application by the Holy Spirit of Christ to an individual... (this) view has the merit of historical propriety as well as theological acceptability. John the Baptist had stirred the nation by his ministry and stress on **repentance** (Mt 3:1-6). “**Water**” would remind Nicodemus of the Baptist’s emphasis. So Jesus was saying that Nicodemus, in order to enter the kingdom, needed to turn to Him (repent) in order to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. (See [Bible Knowledge Commentary - Page 281](#))

(6) Jesus used the OT imagery of “water” and “wind” to refer to the work of God from above (Isa 44:3-5; Eze 37:9, 10).

**Charles Swindoll** - The ministry of John the Baptizer was well-known to everyone in Jerusalem, including this rabbi. John called Jews to a “**baptism of repentance**” in which Jews were to come to God as if for the first time, like Gentile converts. But remember —John’s baptism was only a symbol of new life (Jn 1:31-33); the baptism of Jesus is a baptism of actual life...abundant life, spiritual life, life made possible only through the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, connecting the concepts “*born anōthen*” and “*born of water and the Spirit*” should have sparked the rabbi’s memory of a familiar Old Testament promise in (Ezekiel. 36:24-28) (Borrow [Insights on John](#) )

**Steven Cole** favors an interpretation not specifically mentioned in the list above - Since Jesus reproaches Nicodemus for not understanding these things Jn (3:10), He was probably referring to the promise of Ezekiel 36:25-27: “*Then I will sprinkle clean **water** on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My **Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances*” Ezekiel predicted a time when God would cleanse His people from their sins and give them a new heart and new spirit and put His Spirit within them so that they would walk in obedience to His Word. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus when He ratified the New Covenant with His blood and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in all that believe in Him. Nicodemus, who knew the Old Testament, should have connected Ezekiel’s prophecy with Jesus’ words (Jn 3:3), “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

**John MacArthur**- Since Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand this truth (Jn 3:10), it must have been something with which he was familiar. **Water** and **Spirit** often refer symbolically in the Old Testament to spiritual renewal and cleansing (cf. Nu 19:17–19; Isa. 4:4; 32:15; 44:3; 55:1; Joel 2:28–29; Zech. 13:1). In one of the most glorious passages in all of Scripture describing Israel’s restoration to the Lord by the new covenant, God said through Ezekiel, “*For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.* (Ezek. 36:24–27) It was surely this passage that Jesus had in mind, showing **regeneration** to be an Old Testament truth (cf. Dt. 30:6; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 11:18–20 - see [note above](#)) with which Nicodemus would have been acquainted. Against this Old Testament backdrop, Christ’s point was unmistakable: Without the spiritual washing of the soul, a cleansing accomplished only by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) through the Word of God (Eph. 5:26), no one can enter God’s kingdom.” (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Constable** - Whatever its meaning “**born of water and the Spirit**” must equal being born “again” or “from above” (v. 3) since Jesus used this phrase to clarify the new birth for Nicodemus. Second, the definite article translated “the” before “Spirit” is absent in the Greek text. The English translators have inserted it to clarify their interpretation of “spirit” (Gr. pneuma) as the Holy Spirit. A more literal translation would be simply “born of water and spirit.” Third, the construction of the phrase in the Greek text indicates that the preposition “of” governs both “water” and “Spirit.” This means that Jesus was clarifying regeneration by using two terms that both describe the new birth. He was not saying that two separate things have to be present for regeneration to happen. It has but one source. Fourth, Jesus’ criticism of Nicodemus for not understanding these things (v. 10) indicates that what He taught about the source of regeneration was clear in the Old Testament. The only view that seems to be consistent with all four of these criteria is as follows. The Old Testament often used **water** metaphorically to symbolize spiritual cleansing and renewal (Num. 19:17–19; Isa. 55:1–3; cf. Ps. 51:10; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Zech. 14:8). God’s spirit (or Spirit) in the Old Testament represents God’s life (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; 6:3; Job 34:14). God promised that He would pour out His spirit on people as water (Isa. 32:15–16; Joel 2:28–29). The result of that outpouring would be a new heart for those on whom the spirit came (Jer. 31:31–34). Thus the revelation that God would bring cleansing and renewal as water by His Spirit was clear in the Old Testament. Jesus evidently meant that unless a person has experienced spiritual cleansing and renewal from God’s spirit (or Spirit) he or she cannot enter the kingdom. This is what He meant by being born from above or again (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11).

Kenneth Wuest offers another interpretation of **water and the Spirit** - One of the basic rules of interpretation is to ascertain just what the Word of God meant to the one who recorded it, and to the one who received it at the time it was written. Another rule of interpretation is to take into consideration the other uses of the same term in other places. Our Lord was talking to a man who was learned in the Old Testament scriptures. He would be expected to use Jewish phraseology in a case like this. In John 7:37, 38, He

uses the word "water" as referring to the Holy Spirit. When speaking to the Samaritan woman who as a Samaritan was familiar at least with the Pentateuch, He uses the word "water" in such a way that we are led to believe that He referred to the Holy Spirit, because He speaks of the water which He will give, as a spring of water leaping up into life eternal. In neither place does He explain the symbol, John finding it necessary to do so in 7:39, and for the reason that he is writing for Gentile believers. Nicodemus, as a Jewish theologian, is supposed to have been familiar with Isaiah 44:3, where water is a type of the Holy Spirit, and also with Isaiah 55:1, where the prophet says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." These considerations lead the writer to incline to the interpretation that the word "water" here was used by Jesus as a symbol of the Holy Spirit as He does in the case of the Samaritan woman and also when He spoke at the great day of the feast. The Greek word translated "and" has other uses than merely that of a connective. It has an emphatic or ascensive use, and is at that time translated by the word "even." Thus, the translation here could read, "Except a man be born of water, even of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Another consideration pointing to this interpretation and translation is the fact that when Jesus recurs again to the new birth in verses 6 and 8, He does not refer to water at all, but only to the Spirit. Evidently seeing the blank look on the face of Nicodemus, our Lord adds the words "even of the Spirit," thus explaining the symbol to this theologian of the Old Testament who should have understood it. (Great Truths to Live By)

One truth is clear: the new birth is from God through the Spirit. As John Phillips points out "Water and the Spirit. Whatever else the words mean, they had a meaning that Nicodemus could appreciate, apprehend, and appropriate. The Lord was not trying to be mystical and obtuse. He was trying to lead Nicodemus into the experience of the new birth. The Lord was answering the question how. He was not concealing truth but revealing truth." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**he cannot enter into the kingdom of God** - Jesus repeats the warning in Jn 3:3 substituting **enter** for **see**, which are parallel descriptions, for logically only one who enters can see the kingdom.

## PASSAGES THAT DESCRIBE ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD/HEAVEN

Take a moment and read these 16 passages, asking the Spirit to give you illumination and you will have a better sense of what Jesus meant by entering the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) and who can and cannot enter it. Note that all but one are spoken by Jesus. Jesus repeatedly describes wealthy as an impediment to entrance into the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus was a wealthy man. Most Americans are considered "wealthy" by the rest of the world!

(Mt 5:20) "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not **enter the kingdom of heaven**."

(Mt 7:21) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' **will enter the kingdom of heaven**, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."

Matthew 18:3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, **you will not enter the kingdom of heaven**."

Matthew 19:23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man **to enter the kingdom of heaven**."

Matthew 19:24 "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to **enter the kingdom of God**."

Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you **shut off the kingdom of heaven from people**; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor **do you allow those who are entering to go in**."

Mark 9:47 "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you **to enter the kingdom of God** with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell,"

Mark 10:15 "Truly I say to you, whoever does not **receive the kingdom of God** like a child will not enter it at all."

Mark 10:23 And Jesus, looking around, \*said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to **enter the kingdom of God!**"

Mark 10:24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, **how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!**"



Mark 10:25 “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to **enter the kingdom of God.**”

Luke 18:17 “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the **kingdom of God** like a child will not **enter it at all.**”

Luke 18:24 And Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to **enter the kingdom of God!**”

Luke 18:25 “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to **enter the kingdom of God.**”

John 3:5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he **cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**”

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must **enter the kingdom of God.**”

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## **We Can't But God Can**

Unless one is born of . . . the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. —John 3:5

Today's Scripture: John 3:1-16

Pastor Craig was having an intense conversation at a health club with Jacob, a man he had befriended. It started after Jacob climbed onto the exercise bike beside him. Craig asked, “Are you going to see the movie *The Passion of the Christ*?” “No!” came the quick response. As the two men pedaled side-by-side, they had a half-hour discussion about the purpose of Jesus’ death. When they parted, Jacob said, “I still don’t think I’ll see the movie.”

Craig felt frustrated. Nothing would please him more than to see Jacob open his heart to Christ. But he could see no evidence that Jacob would ever budge.

As believers in Jesus, we sometimes become frustrated when people who are not believers refuse to trust in Him. When that happens, we must remember that our role is to obey the command to tell others about Christ; the Holy Spirit’s work is to convict and save them. People need to be born of the Spirit (John 3:5,7); we can neither believe for them nor redeem them. He is the One who convicts of sin, forgives, and imparts new life from above. We are powerless to do more—except pray.

We witness faithfully and pray, and God performs the miracle of salvation. David C. Egner [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Lord, help me make my witness clear  
And labor faithfully,  
So friends and neighbors turn to Christ  
Through what they hear from me.  
—Anon.

We plant the seed; God gives the harvest.

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## **John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"**

NET John 3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

GNT John 3:6 τ γεγεννημ νον κ τ ς σαρκ ς σ ρξ στιν, κα τ γεγεννημ νον κ το πνε ματος πνε μ στιν.

NLT John 3:6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.

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

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

NIV John 3:6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

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

CSB John 3:6 Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.

NKJ John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

NRS John 3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

YLT John 3:6 that which hath been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which hath been born of the Spirit is spirit.

NAB John 3:6 What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.

NJB John 3:6 what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

GWN John 3:6 Flesh and blood give birth to flesh and blood, but the Spirit gives birth to things that are spiritual.

BBE John 3:6 That which has birth from the flesh is flesh, and that which has birth from the Spirit is spirit.

- **That with is born.** Mt 1:20. Jn 1:13. Ge 5:3. 6:5, 12. Jb 14:4. 15:14-16. 25:4. Ps 51:10. Ro 7:5, 18, 25. 8:1, 4, 5-9, 13. 1 Co 15:47-49, 50. 2 Co 5:17. Ga 5:16-21, 24. Ep 2:3. Col 2:11.
- **flesh.** Jn 6:63. 1 Pe 3:18. 4:6.
- **and that.** Ezek 11:19, 20. Ezek 36:26, 27. Ro 8:5, 9. 1 Co 6:17. Gal 5:17. 1 Jn 3:9.
- **born.** Jn 1:13.
- **the Spirit.** Mt 3:16. Jn 7:39.
- **is spirit.** Lk 1:17. Ps 51:10. Jdg 11:40. Jn 4:24. 2 Sa 15:6. Ps 119:59. Ga 5:22. Gal 6:8. Ep 4:22, 23. 1 Jn 4:7.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## TWO TYPES OF BIRTH: LIKE BEGETS LIKE

Jesus is continuing to help Nicodemus understand the difference between natural birth and spiritual birth by making this obvious declaration. The common saying **like begets like** means a strong similarity between the offspring and their parents, and of that of their distant ancestors. Fallen men can reproduce only fallen men. Jesus is continuing to explain to Nicodemus the difference between natural birth and spiritual birth. This verse further would emphasize that the spiritual birth to which Jesus referred was absolutely not a work of the flesh, of human effort, but wholly a work of God by His Spirit.

**That which is born of the flesh is flesh**- In simple terms, this describes our natural physical birth that brought us into this world

**SIDE NOTE:** Keep in mind as [discussed below](#) that the word **flesh** has several different meanings in the NT, depending on the context. In this passage it speaks primarily of physical flesh, that which we can feel and touch, our bodies. The problem with our physical flesh is that it also comes associated with a fallen nature, a sin nature, which is also often called "flesh." Physical flesh is what we look like. Fallen flesh is that unseen part of us which causes us to act ungodly. One writer describes our fallen flesh as "anti-god" energy which every man born in physical flesh inherits from Adam.

Now back to our passage where **flesh** describes our physical being. **Flesh** "cannot give rise to anything other than what is earthy." (Morris) But we were born with a major problem as a result of Adam's sin. We were born as men and women who have [fallen flesh](#) (i.e., "like begets like!"). All men enter this world in one family, the family headed by Adam and all have inherited his fatal propensity to sin, aka the [fallen flesh](#) (Ro 5:12<sup>±</sup>). Paul says it this way in his letter to the Corinthians "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." (1 Cor 15:22) And so all men and women born of the flesh are born dead spiritually (Eph 2:1, 5<sup>±</sup>) The only way to pass from spiritual death in Adam to spiritual life in Christ is to experience a spiritual rebirth, a new birth. Stated another way, in spiritual terms there are two kingdoms on earth, one is of the kingdom of Satan who rules over all people, for all are born with [fallen flesh](#). The other the Kingdom is that ruled by God, but to enter that kingdom requires a new birth. Paul describes what happened the moment we believed in Christ and were born again by the Spirit writing that "the Father, Who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light....rescued us from the domain ([exousia](#) = the right and the might Satan has over all those still in Adam, still spiritually dead, still in their flesh) of darkness (KINGDOM OF DARKNESS RULED BY SATAN), and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." (Col 1:12-13<sup>±</sup>) Notice how this passage dovetails with Jesus opening salvo to Nicodemus "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**" (Jn 3:3<sup>±</sup>). When we are born again by the Spirit, at that very moment we are transferred by God from the kingdom "darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18) and are given "spiritual eyes" (cf Eph 1:18-19<sup>±</sup>) to "**see the Kingdom of God.**" And once we are born into the family of God (Jn 1:12<sup>±</sup>), the kingdom of God a spiritual conflict begins! The [fallen flesh](#) (born again people still have residual fallen flesh and will possess it until glorified) and the Spirit (Who indwells every born again person) are thereafter in

perpetual conflict (Gal 5:16, 17, 18-25+).

**Kistemaker** says this verse could be paraphrased "as follows: sinful human nature produces sinful human nature (cf. Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Cf. also Ps. 51:5). The Holy Spirit produces the sanctified human nature." (BNTC-Jn)

**J C Ryle** - In this verse, our Lord gives Nicodemus the reason why the change of heart called "new birth," is a thing of such absolute necessity, and why no slight moral change will suffice. Nicodemus had spoken of "entering a second time into his mother's womb." Our Lord tells him, that even if such a thing was possible, it would not make him fit for the kingdom of God. The child of human parents would always be like the parents from which it sprung, if it was born a hundred times over. All men and women are by nature corrupt sinful, fleshly, and alienated from God. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. 8:8+) Their children will always be born with a nature like that of their parents. To bring a clean thing out of an unclean, is proverbially impossible, A bramble will never bear grapes, however much it may be cultivated, and a natural man will never be a godly man without the Spirit. In order to be really spiritual and fit for the kingdom of God, a new power from without must enter into a man's nature....Human nature is so utterly fallen, corrupt, and carnal, that nothing can come from it by natural generation, but a fallen, corrupt, and carnal offspring. There is no self-curative power in man. He will always go on reproducing himself. To become spiritual and fit for communion with God, nothing less is required than the entrance of the Spirit of God into our hearts.

**John Phillips** - Nicodemus had experienced a physical birth which put him into this world. He needed to have a spiritual birth to make him an heir of that (heavenly) world. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Leon Morris** - The teaching of this verse is succinctly paraphrased by Hoskyns: "There is no evolution from flesh to Spirit." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**William McDonald** - The expression that which is **born of the flesh is flesh** means that children born of human parents are born in sin and are hopeless and helpless as far as saving themselves is concerned. On the other hand, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. A spiritual birth takes place when a person trusts in the Lord Jesus. When a person is born again through the Spirit, he receives a new nature, and is made fit for the kingdom of God." (Believer's Commentary)

**Isaac Watts** speaks to the impotence of the flesh in bringing about the New Birth....

How helpless guilty nature lies,  
Unconscious of its load!  
The heart, unchanged can never rise  
To happiness and God.

The will perverse, the passions blind,  
In paths of ruin stray;  
Reason, debased, can never find  
The safe, the narrow way.

Can aught, beneath a power divine,  
The stubborn will subdue?  
Tis Thine, almighty Saviour, Thine,  
To form the heart anew.

O change these wretched hearts of ours,  
And give them life divine!  
Then shall our passions and our powers,  
Almighty Lord, be Thine!

– Isaac Watts

**Flesh** (4561)(**sarx**) is used 147 times in the NT and defies a single, simple definition (some Greek lexicons list up to 11 definitions for sarx!). The diligent disciple must carefully observe the **context** of each use of sarx in order to accurately discern which nuance is intended. The range of meaning extends from the physical flesh (as in the present passage) to the entire person, and even to all humankind! Paul's most common meaning of **sarx** is to refer to **fallen human nature, fallen flesh** that hates God and is in continual rebellion against Him. And sadly we as believers still possess this pernicious, profane predilection which is why we continually need to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18+) so that we might be enabled by Him to continually walk by Him (by the Spirit - Gal 5:16+), for that is the only sure way to put to death the **fallen flesh** (energized) deeds of our mortal body (Ro 8:13+). There is not other hope for victory over the **fallen flesh** other than total dependence on the

**And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit-** This refers to the spiritual nature which the Spirit produces. The **spirit** that is born (comes into existence at time of regeneration) from God's **Spirit** has an OT parallel (with which Nicodemus should have been familiar!) which gives a prophetic promise of God's gift of a "new spirit" (able to discern spiritual truths, etc) and the gift of His Spirit (Who enables life in this new realm) which says "Moreover, I (GOD) will give you (SPEAKING TO NATION OF ISRAEL BUT THIS TRUTH IS APPLICABLE TO GENTILES WHO BELIEVE IN THE MESSIAH) a new heart and put a **new spirit within you**; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put **My Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." (Ezekiel 36:26, 27+)

**John Phillips** - The life (the Spirit) imparts is the life of God. God made human beings to be inhabited by God. The human spirit was to be inhabited by the Holy Spirit. When sin came in, the Spirit went out. Through the miracle of the new birth, sin is cleansed, the Holy Spirit returns to inhabit the human spirit, and spiritual life begins. It is a miracle. It opens up a new world. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Robert Mounce** - People live in two realms. Flesh speaks of natural birth with its physical weakness and mortality; Spirit speaks of a supernatural birth into an entirely different realm. The realm of the spiritual is radically different from the realm of the natural, and nothing short of a new birth does justice to that distinction. Although Nicodemus lived in a religious culture that taught salvation by deeds, he should not have been surprised to learn that entrance into the realm of the spirit would require a spiritual birth. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Volume 10](#))

**D A Carson** writes that "The second occurrence of 'spirit' is not an adjective: we are not to read, 'The Spirit gives birth to spiritual people', understanding 'spiritual people' in some vague or merely functional way. What is in view is a new nature, not turning over a new leaf." Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

Jesus elaborates on the role of the Spirit in bringing about the new life

**"It is the Spirit Who gives life**; the flesh profits ([opheleo](#)) nothing (ABSOLUTELY NOTHING); the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. (Jn 6:63+)

**Comment** - Jesus is saying His words "are spirit-giving and life-producing." In other words what happens in the new birth is a supernatural work by the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual life into being where it did not exist.

This spiritual life is in Jesus, in covenant oneness with Him, in union with Him. It is eternal life in a Person, Jesus Christ, for John writes "And the testimony is this, that God has given us **eternal life**, and this **life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." (1 Jn 5:11, [12+](#)) " By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that **we might live through Him.**" (1 Jn 4:9+) Similarly in his Gospel John writes that "these ("signs" - Jn 20:30) have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that **believing you may have life in His Name.**" (Jn 20:31) Where is **life**? In His Name, which is equivalent to saying in His Person, all that He is as the God-Man, for Name conveys that sense. So there is no spiritual life, no eternal life, apart from connection with Jesus and belief in Jesus.

**Piper** adds that "In the new birth, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ in a living union. Christ is life. Christ is the vine where life flows. We are the branches. " (John 15:1–11).

**Born of the Spirit** then is another way to describe regeneration which **S Lewis Johnson** defines this way "What is regeneration? What is new birth? Well to put it simply we could say that regeneration is the divine act of instantaneously communicating spiritual life to men." ([Born of Water and Spirit](#))

**Born** ([1080](#)) see preceding note on [gennaō](#). All uses by John - Jn. 1:13; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:4; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:6; Jn. 3:7; Jn. 3:8; Jn. 8:41; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 9:19; Jn. 9:20; Jn. 9:32; Jn. 9:34; Jn. 16:21; Jn. 18:37; 1 Jn. 2:29; 1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Jn. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:4; 1 Jn. 5:18

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

O what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood. |

-Crosby

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**ILLUSTRATION** - A minister was seeking to reach the heart of a dying doctor. The minister had spoken to him about conversion,

forgiveness, redemption—all the themes at the heart of the Christian gospel. Nothing seemed to reach the dying man. Then he spoke to him of regeneration, of the need for being reborn, and that brought enlightenment. Over many years the doctor had attended countless births. "A new birth!" he exclaimed, "Why, that's what I need. A baby has no past—only a future. That's what I need." And so do we all.

### John 3:7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

NET John 3:7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.'

GNT John 3:7 μ θαυμ σ ς πι π ν σοι, Δε μ ς γεννηθ ναι νωθεν.

NLT John 3:7 So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'

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

ESV John 3:7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

NIV John 3:7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

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

CSB John 3:7 Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again.

NKJ John 3:7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

NRS John 3:7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

YLT John 3:7 'Thou mayest not wonder that I said to thee, It behoveth you to be born from above;

NAB John 3:7 Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.'

NJB John 3:7 Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above.

GWN John 3:7 Don't be surprised when I tell you that all of you must be born from above.

BBE John 3:7 Do not be surprised that I say to you, It is necessary for you to have a second birth.

- **Do not be amazed.** Jn 3:12. Jn 5:28. 6:61-63. 1 Jn 3:13.
- **You must.** Jn 3:3. Jn 4:24. Job 14:4. 15:14. Mt 13:33-35. Ac 4:12. Ro 3:9-19. 8:5, 7. Ro 9:22-25. Ro 12:1, 2. 1 Co 2:14. Ep 4:22-24. Col 1:12. He 12:14. 1 Pe 1:14-16, 22. Rev 21:27.
- **be born.** Ac 13:33. Ga 6:15. 1 Pe 2:2.
- **again, or, from above.** Jn 3:3 Jn 1:12, 13. Ezek 36:27. Ezek 37:14. Mt 19:28. 2 Co 5:17. 1 Pe 1:3, 23.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### AN ABSOLUTE MUST A UNIVERSAL NEED

The new birth is so important, so foundational, that He repeats this truth again (cf John 3:3). Jesus does not describe an optional way of life, a "might" but a "must." In English the verb **must** means that which is required as a necessary requirement. And in this passage He changes the pronoun "you" from singular to plural thus describing the absolute need of every person ever born. "The plural 'you' sets Jesus over against not just Nicodemus, but the entire human race." (Carson Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again** - Nicodemus had been been taught and likely had taught that salvation was a result of one's own meritorious efforts and thus he would have been in a state of shock and awe at Jesus' teaching on his need for a new spiritual birth. And this need for spiritual rebirth was not just for Nicodemus, as Jesus uses **you** in the plural which indicates that new birth is the need of all mankind, all fallen humanity. The verb **must** is a strong term which speaks of the absolute necessity of the new birth. **Must** means the new birth is not optional but obligatory, even imperative. It was the primary prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom. Jesus uses the same verb in John 3:14 in His illustration of His crucifixion declaring "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so **MUST** the Son of Man be lifted up." (cf "must" in Jn 12:34) And so for Nicodemus this was an absolute **must**. He **must** realize that in order to see or enter God's kingdom, He **must** be made alive in the spirit by the Spirit (Jn 3:8, Ro 8:11+). People **must** not stumble at or reject the importance of Jesus' unsettling words, for just as we were not in control of our first birth, we are not in control of our second birth. It is given as a gift by a direct act of God! This truth is disconcerting to many. Nevertheless, Jesus says new birth is not the must of moral duty, but the must of divine necessity. They

**must** be born from above. The **necessity** is absolute and is universally binding. Even godly, righteous, scholarly Nicodemus **must** be born again, and so **must** we dear reader! **Have you been born again?**

**J C Ryle** - It is evident that the thing which stumbled Nicodemus was the idea of any "new birth" at all being necessary. He felt unable to understand what this "new birth" was....It is a noteworthy and striking fact, that no doctrine has excited such surprise in every age of the Church, and has called forth so much opposition from the great and learned, as this very doctrine of the new birth. The men of the present day who sneer at conversions and revivals, as fanaticism and enthusiasm, are nowise better than Nicodemus. Like him, they expose their own ignorance of the work of the Holy Ghost.

**D A Carson** - For human beings, those born of the flesh, to experience this new birth that makes them children of God, the eternal Word, himself God (Jn 1:1, 18+), became flesh (Jn 1:14+) Nicodemus could not have been expected to know all that the readers of the Prologue have absorbed, but from his study of Scripture, his grasp of the distance between human beings and God, and the axiom that like produces like, he should have understood the need for a God-given new birth, and God's promise that he would give his people a new heart, a new nature, clean lives and a full measure of the Spirit on the last day. (**ED**: IN SHORT NICODEMUS SHOULD HAVE HAD SOME GRASP OF THESE TRUTHS BECAUSE OF PASSAGES LIKE - Ezekiel 11:19-20+ Ezekiel 36:26-27+ Jeremiah 31:33+ Jeremiah 32:39+) That is why Jesus told Nicodemus he should not be surprised. Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Constable** adds that the Old Testament spoke of a spiritual birth and "revealed that entrance into the kingdom is a spiritual matter, not a matter of physical descent or merit. This was a revelation that most of the Jews in Jesus' day, including Nicodemus, missed.... Likewise today most people are relying on themselves, who they are and what they have done, for acceptance with God. They, too, need to know that they need spiritual cleansing and life that only God can provide. They must be born again or there is no hope of their entering God's kingdom."

Christ was born here below that we might be born from above.

**Amazed** (2296) (**thaumazo** from **thauma** [from **thaomai** = to wonder] = wonder, admiration) means to wonder, marvel, be struck with admiration astonishment, or to be surprised by the unexpected. **Thaumazo** describes the human response when confronted by divine revelation in some form and not surprisingly is found most frequently in the Gospels (33x), where it expresses the wonder and amazement caused by Jesus' miracles (e.g., Mt 9:33+). All uses in John - Jn. 3:7; Jn. 4:27; Jn. 5:20; Jn. 5:28; Jn. 7:15; Jn. 7:21

**Must** (1163) (**dei** from **deo** = to bind or tie together, put in prison; root of **doulos** - bond-servant) refers to what is not optional but needful (binding) out of intrinsic necessity or inevitability. **Dei** describes that which is under the necessity of happening or which must necessarily take place. Note the **must's** in John's Gospel (all are **dei**) = Jn. 3:7 = **must** of the new birth; Jn. 3:14 = **must** of Jesus' crucifixion ; Jn. 3:30 = **must** of Jesus increasing, John decreasing ; Jn. 4:4 = **must** of Jesus going through Samaria; Jn. 4:24 = **must** of the proper worship of God; Jn. 9:4 = **must** of Jesus' work while there was time; Jn. 10:16 = the **must** of saving Gentiles in addition to Jews; Jn. 12:34 = the **must** of the Cross.

**Born** (1080) see preceding note on **gennao**. All uses by John - Jn. 1:13; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:4; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:6; Jn. 3:7; Jn. 3:8; Jn. 8:41; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 9:19; Jn. 9:20; Jn. 9:32; Jn. 9:34; Jn. 16:21; Jn. 18:37; 1 Jn. 2:29; 1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Jn. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:4; 1 Jn. 5:18

**Again** (509) see preceding note on **anothen** which also means from above. All uses - Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 1:3; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:7; Jn. 3:31; Jn. 19:11; Acts 26:5; Gal. 4:9; Jas. 1:17; Jas. 3:15; Jas. 3:17

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**ILLUSTRATION** - In John 3:7 Jesus' used "**Must**" which is a strong word of necessity. It's not an option. Genuine Christianity is, as Puritan Henry Scougal titled his book, nothing less than The Life of God in the Soul of Man [Sprinkle Publications]. Scougal wrote that book in 1677 when he was 27; he died of tuberculosis when he was 28.

In the early 1700's, a 21-year-old Oxford student realized that his debauched, wicked life needed to be reformed. He resolved to change. He denied himself every luxury; he wore ragged clothes; he ate no foods except those that were repugnant to him; he fasted twice a week; he gave his money to the poor; and he spent whole nights in prayer, lying prostrate on the cold stones or the wet grass. But he felt like he was putting a coat of paint on rotten wood. His outward deeds only hid his inward corruption.

Then a college friend, Charles Wesley, gave that struggling young man, George Whitefield, a copy of Scougal's book. Whitefield read Scougal's book with amazement and delight. It told him that true Christianity is the union of the soul with God. It is Christ formed in us. Whitefield said (In A Frank Boreham Treasury, p. 66),

When I read this, a ray of divine light instantaneously darted in upon my soul; and, from that moment, but not

till then, did I know that I must become a new creature. After having undergone innumerable buffetings by day and night, God was pleased at length to remove my heavy load and to enable me, by a living faith, to lay hold on His dear Son. And oh! with what joy—joy unspeakable and full of glory—was I filled when the weight of sin left me and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God broke in upon my disconsolate soul!

Whitefield's favorite Scripture became John 3:3 (KJV), "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He went on to preach more than 18,000 sermons, often on that text, sometimes to outdoor crowds of over 20,000 people (with no microphone!). He made many trips to America and was used greatly in the First Great Awakening. In one of his final sermons, he said (ibid., p. 70), "I am now fifty-five years of age and I tell you that I am more than ever convinced that the truth of the new birth is a revelation from God Himself, and that without it you can never be saved by Jesus Christ."

A friend asked him one day, "Why do you so often preach on Ye must be born again?"

"Because," replied Whitefield solemnly, looking full into the face of the questioner, "because ye must be born again!" [Steven Cole - Why You Need New Birth](#)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - The late Bible teacher, H. A. Ironside, told of visiting a godly Irishman, Andrew Fraser, who had come to California to recover from tuberculosis. The old man could barely speak because his lungs were almost gone. But he opened his worn Bible and, until his strength was gone, he simply, sweetly opened up truth after truth in a way that Ironside had never heard before. Before he knew it, Ironside had tears running down his cheeks. He asked Fraser, "Where did you get all these things? Could you tell me where I could find a book that would open them up to me? Did you learn these things in some seminary or college?"

Fraser answered, "My dear young man, I learned these things on my knees on the mud floor of a little sod cottage in the north of Ireland. There with my Bible open before me, I used to kneel for hours at a time, and ask the Spirit of God to reveal Christ to my soul and to open the Word to my heart. He taught me more on my knees on that mud floor than I ever could have learned in all the seminaries or colleges in the world." (H. A. Ironside, [In the Heavens = corresponds to his commentary on Ephesians 1-6](#) [Loizeaux Brothers], pp. 86-87.) ([Steven Cole - Why You Need New Birth](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION** - God has a purpose for our lives and that purpose is fulfilled in Christ. When a person is "born again," he begins a journey on a path that will bring honor and glory to God if he will dedicate himself to do the will of God in his life. **To reject Christ or to reject God's will is a tragedy and leads to a wasted life.**

One night Canon Hay Aitken preached to a large audience in Bristol, England, on the text, "You must be born again." There in the congregation was a brilliant young man named [Horatio Bottomley](#). He listened intently. He heard the preacher at the end of the sermon call all who were there to trust in the grace of Christ and to commit their lives to Jesus Christ, and he knew the call was addressed to him, too. He was deeply moved, but he said, "Not now, I'll run my own life," and he did. He made a fortune and a name for himself as the champion of the people's rights. He was a lawyer; he exposed swindlers and prosecuted criminals with great vigor. When Bottomley was 63 years of age, this one who had exposed the crimes of others was himself convicted of a crime and sentenced to seven years in prison.

While he was there, another man visited him and asked to pray with him. Bottomley said that would be fine, and in the course of the conversation, the other man told his story. He said, "Yes, many years ago, I was in Bristol, and I heard a preacher, Canon Hay Aitken, preach on the text: You must be born again. I was so deeply moved that I committed my life to Christ, and ever since then, Christ has been my all in all." Bottomley was silent for some time, and then he said, "**I, too, heard that searching message. I, too, was deeply moved. I knew my need of Christ, but I rejected him.**" And then he said remorsefully, "**A life without God is a wasted life.**" (Rod Mattoon) ([ADDENDUM FROM WIKIPEDIA - THERE IS NO EVIDENCE HE WAS EVER BORN AGAIN!](#) - "Bottomley's obituaries dwelt on the common theme of wasted talent." - What a tragic irony that Bottomley's own words of a "wasted life" were the predominant words in his obituary!)

**THOUGHT**- DEAR READER - HERE IS THE MESSAGE - BELIEVE IN CHRIST! BE BORN AGAIN!**DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE!** [See short video by Piper.](#)

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## The Butterfly

It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. —1 Corinthians 15:43

Today's Scripture: John 5:25-29

Outside my study window a beautiful monarch butterfly rested on a flower blossom. It fanned its wings slowly with exquisite grace. That stately monarch was once a repulsive green worm, feeding on milkweed leaves. Then it built a coffin for itself and hung from a

twig. In time it emerged, transformed into a beautiful creature—that butterfly outside my study window.

The life cycle of the butterfly occurs in four stages: the egg, the larva, the chrysalis, and the adult. It begins with an egg—the seed of the butterfly, which hatches into an ugly worm. But that is not its destiny. The worm must “die” to give birth to the butterfly.

**I see in the caterpillar a picture of sinful human beings who need the transformation of a spiritual new birth**(John 3:3). The butterfly, released from its tomb in the chrysalis, illustrates the transformation that will occur when Jesus returns and changes our earthly bodies into glorious bodies fit for life in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). So, the next time you see a butterfly, remember the change that Christ made in you when you put your faith in Him—then look forward with joy to the day of resurrection when your transformation will be complete! —M. R. De Haan, M.D. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### Karrie's Question

Read: John 3:1-21

You must be born again. —John 3:7

Karrie knew her grandpa pretty well. She was aware that he had gone to church all his life and that he was a very good man. She was glad that he had lived an admirable, respectable life. Yet she knew that those things couldn't give him eternal life. So one day while she and her 83-year-old grandfather were riding in the car, this high school senior asked, “**Grandpa, have you been born again?**” What Karrie didn't know was that her grandfather's former secretary had recently been witnessing to him. This made Karrie's question another reason for him to consider his spiritual condition. Soon after Karrie's query, her grandfather and her grandmother were listening to a message by Billy Graham on television and prayed to accept Jesus as their Savior. A few weeks later, Karrie's grandfather died and was ushered into eternal fellowship with God. Has anyone asked you Karrie's question? If not, let me ask you: Have you been born again? All of us are dead in our sins (Eph 2:1, Ro 3:23, Ro 6:23)—until we are given spiritual life through faith in Christ.

Jesus is the only way to eternal life with God. Any other avenue you take is a dead end. Take time today to consider Karrie's question. Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

"How are you doing? What is your name?"

These are the questions we often are asked;

But only "Have you been born again?"

Really will matter when this life is past.

—JDB

The only way to live forever is to be born again.

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### "Retronyms"

Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." —John 3:7

Today's Scripture: John 3:1-17

What do regular coffee, acoustic guitars, and black-and-white television have in common? All are what journalist Frank Mankiewicz calls “retronyms”—words or phrases created because a familiar word needs to be distinguished from a term that refers to a new development or invention. Once, all coffee was regular, all guitars were acoustic, and all TVs were black and white. Not so today, thus the need for a growing list of retronyms, including decaf mocha java, electric guitar, and high-def television. It could be said that Jesus turned the phrase physical birth into a retronym when He told an inquiring man named Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Nicodemus was a religious person who didn't grasp the idea of second birth. “How can a man be born when he is old?” he asked Jesus. “Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” (v.4). Jesus further explained the difference between being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit, then concluded, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (v.7).

Our Christian life begins when we invite Jesus to live within us. It's a miracle! We're born again. By: David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Rejoice, O soul, the debt is paid,

For all our sins on Christ were laid;



We've been redeemed, we're justified—  
And all because the Savior died.  
—D. De Haan

Natural life came by God's breath; eternal life comes by Christ's death.

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## Changed Lives Are Possible

Read: John 3:1-16

Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." —John 3:7

[Lord Kenneth Clark](#), internationally known for his television series [Civilization](#), lived and died without faith in Jesus Christ. He admitted in his autobiography that while visiting a beautiful church he had what he believed to be an overwhelming religious experience. "My whole being," Clark wrote, "was irradiated by a kind of heavenly joy far more intense than anything I had known before." But the "**flood of grace**," as he described it, created a problem. If he allowed himself to be influenced by it, he knew he would have to change, his family might think he had lost his mind, and maybe that intense joy would prove to be an illusion. So he concluded, "**I was too deeply embedded in the world to change course.**"

What a tragedy! If only he had responded to that grace-granted glimpse of another world! If only he had allowed it to turn his attention decisively away from this world until he had become a convinced believer in Jesus Christ, and in that invisible world which is not an illusion but a glorious reality!

**God can enable any and all of us to change no matter how deeply embedded we may be in this world. The miracle of the new birth can take place as we respond positively to the slightest stirring of grace in our souls.** Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

The Savior is waiting to save you  
And cleanse every sin-stain away;  
By faith you can know full forgiveness  
And be a new creature today!  
—HGB

Salvation is not a matter of reformation, but of transformation.

(**ED**: The flood of grace will always far surpass the flood of sin and darkness!)

**Spurgeon has a prayer using Clark's phrase a "flood of grace"** - Oh, for a **flood of grace**! The Lord send to all our churches a great spring tide! Then the indolent will be active enough, and those who were half dead will be full of energy. I know that in my particular dock are lying several vessels that I should like to float, but I cannot stir them. They neither work for God nor come out to the prayer meetings nor give of their substance to spread the Gospel. If the flood would come, you would see what they are capable of. They would be active, fervent, generous, abounding in every good word and work. So may it be! So may it be! May springs begin to flow in all our churches, and may all of you get your share of the streams. Oh, that the Lord may now fill you and then send you out, bearing a **flood of grace** with you. It sounds odd to speak of a man carrying a flood within him. Yet, I hope it will be so, and that out of you will flow "rivers of living water." (Jn 7:38±) May God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**John 3:8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

NET John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

GNT John 3:8 τ πνε μα που θ λει πνε κα τ ν φων ν α το κο εις, λλ ο κ ο δας π θεν ρχεται κα πο π γει· ο τως στ ν π ς γεγεννημ νος κ το πνε ματος.

NLT John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

KJV John 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence

it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

ESV John 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

NIV John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

ASV John 3:8 The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

CSB John 3:8 The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

NKJ John 3:8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

NRS John 3:8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

YLT John 3:8 the Spirit where he willeth doth blow, and his voice thou dost hear, but thou hast not known whence he cometh, and whither he goeth; thus is every one who hath been born of the Spirit.'

NAB John 3:8 The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

NJB John 3:8 The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

GWN John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you don't know where the wind comes from or where it's going. That's the way it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

BBE John 3:8 The wind goes where its pleasure takes it, and the sound of it comes to your ears, but you are unable to say where it comes from and where it goes: so it is with everyone whose birth is from the Spirit.

- **wind.** Mt 3:16. Ge 9:3. Job 37:10-13, 17, 21-23. Ps 107:25, 29. 135:7. Eccl 11:4, 5. Ezek 37:9. Acts 2:2. Acts 4:31. 1 Co 2:11. 12:11.
- **the sound.** Ac 2:6.
- **so.** Jn 1:13. Is 55:9-13. Mk 4:26-29. Lk 6:43, 44. Ro 9:15, 16. 1 Co 2:11. 1 Jn 2:29. 3:8, 9.
- **Spirit.** Mt 3:16.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ILLUSTRATION FROM NATURE OF THE MYSTERY OF NEW BIRTH

**The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it comes from and where it is going-**

It is interesting that the Greek word for **wind** ([pneuma](#)) is also the word of **Spirit**. This is the only the NT use of [pneuma](#) for "**wind**", although the OT commonly used the same Hebrew word ([ruach](#)) for both "**wind**" and "**spirit**." The reason for its unique use is to emphasize the similarity of the operation of the Holy Spirit to that of the **wind**. As the **wind** is invisible, cannot be controlled and cannot be fully understood, its effects can be clearly seen. In the same way the work of the Holy Spirit is the mysterious, supernatural in bringing about the new birth.

[Robertson](#) - Tholuck thinks that the night-wind swept through the narrow street as Jesus spoke....(adding that) the Holy Spirit works His own way beyond our comprehension even as men even yet do not know the law of the wind.

When Jesus used this symbol, Nicodemus should have recalled the famous prophetic passage in Ezekiel 37:1-14+. In that passage the prophet Ezekiel saw a valley full of dead bones, but when he prophesied to the **wind**, the Spirit came and gave the bones life. Notice it was the combination of the **Spirit of God** and the **Word of God** that gave life. The nation of Israel (including Nicodemus and his fellow council members) was dead and hopeless. They needed the new birth from above.

**Alan Carr** on the **wind** as an illustration of the **Spirit** - Jesus uses the image of the wind to describe the action of the Spirit. His movements, like those of the wind, cannot be predicted or anticipated. Like the wind, the movement of the Spirit is invisible, but powerful! When He passes by, He touches whom He will and His presence is easily seen!

**Bob Utley** - The point is that the wind has freedom, as does the Spirit. One cannot see the wind, but rather its effects; so, too the

Spirit. Man's salvation is not in his control, but is in the Spirit's control ([John 3](#))

**Constable** - There are three similarities. First, both the Spirit and the wind operate sovereignly. Man does not and cannot control either one. Second, we perceive the presence of both by their effects. Third, we cannot explain their actions since they arise from unseen and unknowable factors.

**John Phillips** - The laws of both (WIND AND SPIRIT) are known only to a very small degree. Both are invisible. Both can be sensed, and the presence of both is revealed in their effects. The action of the Spirit on the soul of sinner and saint is analogous to the action of the wind in the natural world. As the branches of a tree betray the passing of the wind, so do a person's thoughts, words, and deeds reveal that an invisible force has influenced him or her. The wind can blow gently or with gale force. It can bring rain, tempest, and storm, or it can drive the clouds away. The wind of the Spirit was blowing into the soul of Nicodemus that night, but it was not at his beck and call. He had better bow before its gentle influence before it departed, perhaps forever. It is imperative that when the Holy Spirit is visiting a soul, in convicting, converting, regenerating, and renewing power, the soul respond while yet it can. (Exploring John) IS THE SPIRIT BLOWING IN YOUR HEART DEAR READER? YIELD TO HIS SOVEREIGN WORK. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Rod Mattoon** - As the wind is irregular, blowing soft and strong, the Holy Spirit speaks gently and powerfully. As the wind is invisible, the Holy Spirit is unseen, yet working. The wind is also inscrutable. Its origin, nature, and activities are mysterious. You can't tell where it comes from or goes for certain. The workings of the Holy Spirit are mysterious and secret. The wind is also indispensable. It is needed for vegetation to spread and for plants to be fertilized. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no spiritual life at all. The wind is invigorating. Sick patients have found refreshment in the mountains or on the sea sides. The Holy Spirit strengthens, energizes, empowers, and revives the inner man. (**ILLUSTRATION**) It is said that a certain guide lived in the deserts of Arabia who never lost his way. He carried with him a homing pigeon with a very fine cord attached to one of its legs. When he was in doubt as to which path he should take, he threw the bird into the air. The pigeon quickly strained at the cord to fly in the direction of home, and thus led the guide accurately to his goal. Because of this unique practice, he was known as the "**Dove Man**." So too, the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Dove, is willing and able to direct us in the narrow way that leads to the more abundant life if we will submit and follow His leading. (Treasures from John)

**So is everyone who is born of the Spirit**- As one cannot see the wind at work unless he sees its results so it is with the new birth. The movement of the Spirit is mysterious, like the wind. You cannot see the wind; you can only see the results of its moving, such as the movement of tree branches. You cannot see the Spirit; you can only see the results of His works, such as the changed lives of those who have been born again.

**THOUGHT** - There is a corollary thought that is eminently practical - when the Spirit works to circumcise a heart and give a new heart in the new birth, the effects should be visible. This begs the question - you may say "I prayed a prayer to be born again when I was a teenager, so I know that I am going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." While that could indeed be true, the question is this -- has there been evidence of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Has your life been more heavenward since the Spirit has birthed you into Christ (2 Cor 5:17+). I am not speaking of perfection, but of general direction of your life and lifestyle. The Spirit gives us a new heart with new desires, and while this new birth and His indwelling presence do not cause us to **sinless**, His presence should result in demonstrable evidence that we **sin less!**

**Isaac Watts** takes up the image of the wind and the Spirit in his hymn:

The Spirit, like some heavenly wind,  
Breathes on the sons of flesh,  
Creates anew the carnal mind,  
And forms the man afresh.

Our quickened souls awake and rise  
From their long sleep of death;  
On heavenly things we fix our eyes,  
And praise employs our breath.

The new birth is mysterious and cannot fully comprehend all the spiritual dynamics of regeneration. Although some people can tell you the day of their new birth, some cannot (I know my new birth was in the Fall, 1984) . So just as one does not remember his physical birth, a person may be unable to pinpoint his spiritual birth. If someone asks you today "How do you know you were born? You weren't there to witness it?" you would answer them by saying the fact that I have life today is proof that I was BORN PHYSICALLY. By the same analogy, if one asks you how do you know that you have been **born again**, you would answer because of the new life that is now in me...this new life, with new desires, new motivations, new power, new hope, new direction, etc, is the

present proof that I have indeed been born again from above by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Thus just as the proof of the one is the reality of one's physical life, so the proof of the other is the reality of his spiritual life! We must not miss this vital point in the modern day church. No root means no fruit and no fruit is a dead tree which will be thrown away (Jn 15:6). Do not be deceived. Not all who cry "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do (motivated by new desire in their heart and new power from the Spirit) the will of the Father. (Mt 7:21+) A wise man HEARS Jesus' "TRULY, TRULY" and ACTS upon what he hears. (Mt 7:24+) Lord, open the eyes of those who are walking in darkness, falsely thinking they are walking in the light. Amen.

**Born** (1080) see preceding note on [gennaio](#). All uses by John - Jn. 1:13; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:4; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:6; Jn. 3:7; Jn. 3:8; Jn. 8:41; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 9:19; Jn. 9:20; Jn. 9:32; Jn. 9:34; Jn. 16:21; Jn. 18:37; 1 Jn. 2:29; 1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Jn. 4:7; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:4; 1 Jn. 5:18

#### Related Resource:

- [Counterfeit New Births](#)

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In a sense, then, our heart becomes a "Bethlehem stable," a place where Jesus comes into the world. We open the door to Him by faith, and He is born in us by the blessed Holy Spirit. We make Him known to others by His power in us. He affects every aspect of our lives. We are a "Bethlehem," His place of entrance into today's world. David C. Egner

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**Augustine's Testimony** - I was weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when I heard the voice of children from a neighboring house chanting, "take up and read; take up and read." (Tolle et lege. Tolle et lege) I could not remember ever having heard the like, so checking the torrent of my tears, I arose, interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book and read the first chapter I should find. Eagerly then I returned to the place where I had laid the volume of the apostle. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: "Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." No further would I read, nor did I need to. For instantly at the end of this sentence, it seemed as if a light of serenity infused into my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away. ([See more detailed discussion of Augustine's conversion](#))

Too late have I loved You,  
O Beauty so ancient and so new,

Too late have I loved You!  
You were with me, but I was not with You.

You cried out and pierced my deafness.  
You enlightened my blindness.

I tasted You and I am hungry for You.

You touched me,  
And I am afire with longing for Your embrace  
- AUGUSTINE

#### Related Resource:

- [My Testimony of God's Grace](#)

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#### The Midwife's Tale

The wind blows where it wishes . . . . So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. —John 3:8

Today's Scripture: John 3:1-8

Historian Laurel Ulrich received a Pulitzer Prize for her book *The Midwife's Tale*. The book was based on the diary of Martha Ballard, who lived during the American Revolution. Martha was a midwife who traveled by canoe, horse, or sometimes on foot to assist women in delivering their babies. At a time when many women died in childbirth, Martha's track record was extraordinary. In more than 1,000 deliveries, she never lost a mother in childbirth.

In God's kingdom, there is a spiritual Helper who produces new life. But His role is to bring about "second birth" (John 3:5-8). The

Holy Spirit uses a variety of ways to accomplish this. He convicts the world of sin (John 16:8), empowers the gospel (1 Th. 1:5±), regenerates us from within (Titus 3:5±), and places believers into eternal union with Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Though He is invisible, His life-changing activity can be clearly seen.

Jesus said of the Holy Spirit: "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" (John 3:8).

The Spirit desires to use us in sharing the gospel so others can experience that second birth. Dennis Fisher [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

God sent the Holy Spirit after  
Christ ascended from this earth,  
And this we know—He's left us here  
To share good news of second birth.  
—Hess

The Holy Spirit is the Christian's source of power.

### John 3:9 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"

NET John 3:9 Nicodemus replied, "How can these things be?"

GNT John 3:9 περὶ θη Νικ δῆμος κα ε πεν α τ , Π ς ὄ ναται τα τα γεν σθαι;

NLT John 3:9 "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

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

ESV John 3:9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

NIV John 3:9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

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

CSB John 3:9 "How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus.

NKJ John 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

NRS John 3:9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

YLT John 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said to him, 'How are these things able to happen?'

NAB John 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can this happen?"

NJB John 3:9 'How is that possible?' asked Nicodemus.

GWN John 3:9 Nicodemus replied, "How can that be?"

BBE John 3:9 And Nicodemus said to him, How is it possible for these things to be?

- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NICODEMUS IS "DAZED AND CONFUSED"

**Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"** - More literally "Nicodemus answered and said to him, 'How are these things able ([dunamai](#)) to happen?'" This is not a question of doubt but expresses a desire to understand what Jesus means.

**J C Ryle** - These verses show us, firstly, what gross spiritual ignorance there may be in the mind of a great and learned man. We see a "master of Israel" unacquainted with the first elements of saving religion. Nicodemus is told about the new birth, and at once exclaims, "How can these things be?" When such was the darkness of a Jewish teacher, what must have been the state of the Jewish people? It was indeed due time for Christ to appear! The pastors of Israel had ceased to feed the people with knowledge. The blind were leading the blind, and both were falling into the ditch. (Matt. 15:14.) Ignorance like that of Nicodemus is unhappily far too common in the Church of Christ. We must never be surprised if we find it in quarters where we might reasonably expect knowledge. Learning, and rank, and high ecclesiastical office are no proof that a minister is taught by the Spirit. The successors of

Nicodemus, in every age, are far more numerous than the successors of St. Peter. On no point is religious ignorance so common as on the work of the Holy Ghost. That old stumbling-block, at which Nicodemus stumbled, is as much an offence to thousands in the present day as it was in the days of Christ. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.' (1 Cor. 2:14.) Happy is he who has been taught to prove all things by Scripture, and to call no man master upon earth. (1 Th. 5:21; Mt. 23:9)

*Nicodemus was not belligerent,  
but only bewildered*

--John Phillips [Exploring John](#)

**John MacArthur**- Although he was a renowned teacher, Nicodemus proved to be a poor learner. His question, "How can these things be?" indicates that he had made little progress since verse 4. Despite Jesus' further clarification in verses 5–8, Nicodemus still could not accept what he was hearing. He could not let go of his legalistic religious system and realize that salvation was a sovereign, gracious work of God's Spirit. (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Robertson** is fairly hard on old Nicodemus writing "He falls back into his "stupid misunderstanding." There are none so dull as those who will not see. Preoccupation prevents insight. Literally one must often empty his mind to receive new truth."

**Constable on these things** - Nicodemus betrayed his ignorance of Old Testament revelation with his question (cf. 1 Sa 10:6; Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:25–28; Jer. 31:33; Joel 2:28–29).

**Matthew Henry** - Christ's stating of the doctrine and the necessity of regeneration, it should seem, made it not clearer to Nicodemus. Thus the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man. Many think that cannot be proved, which they cannot believe. Christ's discourse of gospel truths, vs. 11-13, shows the folly of those who make these things strange unto them; and it recommends us to search them out. Jesus Christ is every way able to reveal the will of God to us; for he came down from heaven, and yet is in heaven. We have here a notice of Christ's two distinct natures in one person, so that while he is the Son of man, yet he is in heaven. God is the "HE THAT IS," and heaven is the dwelling-place of his holiness. The knowledge of this must be from above, and can be received by faith alone.

### John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"

NET John 3:10 Jesus answered, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand these things?"

GNT John 3:10 πεκρθη ησο ρκα επεν ατ, Σε διδσκαλος το σρα λκα τατα ο γινσκες;

NLT John 3:10 Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things?"

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

ESV John 3:10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

NIV John 3:10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

ASV John 3:10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?

CSB John 3:10 "Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied.

NKJ John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

NRS John 3:10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

YLT John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, 'Thou art the teacher of Israel -- and these things thou dost not know!

NAB John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this?"

NJB John 3:10 Jesus replied, 'You are the Teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things!

GWN John 3:10 Jesus told Nicodemus, "You're a well-known teacher of Israel. Can't you understand this?"

BBE John 3:10 And Jesus, answering, said, Are you the teacher of Israel and have no knowledge of these things?"

- **Are you** Ge 3:22. Is 9:16. Isa 29:10-12. Isa 56:10. Je 8:8, 9. Mt 11:25, 15:14. 22:29.
- **The teacher** Lk 2:46. 5:17. Ac 5:34. Ro 2:20.
- **Israel.** Jn 1:31.
- **do not understand these things.** Jn 9:30. Ex 33:19. Dt 10:16. 30:6. 1 Chr 29:19. Ps 51:6, 10. Ps 73:1. Is 11:6-9. Isa 66:7-9. Jer 31:33. Jer 32:39, 40. Ezek 11:19. Ezek 18:31, 32. Ezek 36:25-27. Ezek 37:23, 24. Mt 22:29. Ro 2:28, 29. Php 3:3. Col 2:11.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE SANS SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

[Sans](#) means without.

**Teacher** is the very word Nicodemus had called Jesus, and now Jesus calls Nicodemus "THE TEACHER." The irony is that THE teacher gets taught, by THE TEACHER OF TEACHERS! Nicodemus as the teacher of Israel had knowledge, but what he lacked was spiritual understanding. While Paul's words are not exactly descriptive of Nicodemus, they still make the point of why he would not understand what Jesus was explaining.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and **he cannot understand them**, because (HERE IS THE KEY) **they are spiritually appraised**. (1 Cor 2:14+, cf Eph 4:18, Ro 10:3)

**Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher ([didaskalos](#)) of Israel - KJV** has "Master of Israel," but teacher is more accurate rendering. What is Jesus alluding to with this question? First note "**THE**" **teacher of Israel**, where the definite article ("the") suggests that Nicodemus was the main teacher or certainly one of the most esteemed.

**MacArthur** comments that "Jesus' reply emphasized the spiritual bankruptcy of the nation at that time, since even one of the greatest of Jewish teachers did not recognize this teaching on spiritual cleansing and transformation based clearly in the OT (cf. v. 5). The net effect is to show that externals of religion may have a deadening effect on one's spiritual perception." (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

In another note **MacArthur** wrote "Jesus found it inexcusable that this prominent scholar was not familiar with the foundational new covenant teaching from the Old Testament regarding the only way of salvation (cf. 2 Ti 3:15). Sadly, Nicodemus serves as a clear example of the numbing effect that external, legalistic religion has on a person's spiritual perception—even to the point of obscuring the revelation of God. His ignorance also exemplified Israel's spiritual bankruptcy (cf. Rom. 10:2–3). In Paul's words the Jews, failing to recognize "God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own ... did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). Therefore, their "zeal for God [was] not in accordance with knowledge" (Rom. 10:2), meaning that it was all for naught. (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Robertson** - After being told by Jesus and after so propitious a start. His Pharisaic theology had made him almost proof (ED: THINK "WATERPROOF" - Fully resistant; impervious) against spiritual apprehension. It was outside of his groove (rote, rut, rot, the three terrible r's of mere traditionalism).

**Vincent** - Nicodemus is not reproved for the want of previous knowledge, but for the want of perception or understanding when these truths are expounded to him.

**And do not understand these things?** - I am reminded of Paul's question in Romans 2:21+ asking those "who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" **Understand** is [ginosko](#) which means to know, to know intimately or to know by experience. It speaks of acquired knowledge. Nicodemus did not know what he should have known! He may have had HEAD knowledge, but he lacked HEART understanding! It was not due to a failure of intellect but due to a failure to believe (aka - accept or receive - Jn 3:11) the One Who John later describes as "the faithful and true Witness" (Rev 3:14+) (Who What are **these things** to which Jesus refers? **These things** in the immediate context would refer to the truths Jesus had declared in John 3:1-8. But there is probably more, for given that Nicodemus was the leading teacher in Israel, Jesus could also be referring to the Old Testament, the very Scriptures that Nicodemus was supposedly an expert in teaching. Why do we say that? As alluded to above, while the specific term "new birth" was not present in the OT, the truth of the necessity of the new birth was taught throughout the OT, beginning in the Pentateuch and through the prophets. See the [preceding note](#) which lists some of the passages with which Nicodemus would have been familiar - Isa 44:3; Ezekiel 11:19, 20, Ezekiel 36:26, 27, Jer 31:31-34, Jer 32:39,40, Dt 30:6, Zechariah 12:10).

Nicodemus came by the darkness of night and was still in spiritual darkness!

One wonders how Nicodemus could have missed the truths in a passage like Ezekiel 36:24-27 where we see mentions of “clean water,” the “new spirit,” and the “new heart” which would parallel the truths of the “water,” “Spirit,” and new birth in Jn 3:3, 7.

For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 25 “Then I will sprinkle **clean water** on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 “Moreover, I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a **heart of flesh**. 27 “**I will put My Spirit within you** and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek 36:24-27+)

**THOUGHT** - One may possess much knowledge of Scripture and still not truly know God! The externals of religion may have a deadening effect on one’s spiritual perception! Knowledge does not save. Only Jesus saves. There will probably be a lot of “Bible scholars” in Hell because they had amazing head knowledge of the Word of God but no heart change wrought by the Word and the Spirit!

**ILLUSTRATION** - While studying in the Holy Lands, a seminary professor of mine met a man who claimed to have memorized the Old Testament--in Hebrew! Needless to say, the astonished professor asked for a demonstration. A few days later they sat together in the man's home. “Where shall we begin?” asked the man. “Psalm 1,” replied my professor, who was an avid student of the psalms. Beginning with Psalm 1:1, the man began to recite from memory, while my professor followed along in his Hebrew Bible. For two hours the man continued word for word without a mistake as the professor sat in stunned silence. When the demonstration was over, my professor discovered something even more astonishing about the man--**he was an atheist!** Here was someone who knew the Scriptures better than most Christians ever will, and yet he didn't even believe in God. (Jack Kuhatschek) And of course the devil has memorized Scripture (which he used on Jesus in the wilderness temptation) but it has no impact on him!

**John 3:11 "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony"**

NET John 3:11 I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony.

GNT John 3:11 μ ν μ ν λ γω σοι τι ο δαμεν λαλο μεν κα ωρ καμεν μαρτυρο μεν, κα τ ν μαρτυρ αν μ ν ο λαμβ νετε.

NLT John 3:11 I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony.

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

ESV John 3:11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

NIV John 3:11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

ASV John 3:11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

CSB John 3:11 "I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony.

NKJ John 3:11 "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

NRS John 3:11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.

YLT John 3:11 'Verily, verily, I say to thee -- What we have known we speak, and what we have seen we testify, and our testimony ye do not receive;

NAB John 3:11 Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony.



NJB John 3:11 'In all truth I tell you, we speak only about what we know and witness only to what we have seen and yet you people reject our evidence.

GWN John 3:11 I can guarantee this truth: We know what we're talking about, and we confirm what we've seen. Yet, you don't accept our message.

BBE John 3:11 Truly, I say to you, We say that of which we have knowledge; we give witness of what we have seen; and you do not take our witness to be true.

- **Truly** - Jn 3: 3, 5. Jn 1:51.
- **We**. Ge 29:27.
- **speak**. Jn 3:13, 32-34. Jn 1:18, 7:16, 8:14, 28, 29, 38. Jn 12:49. Jn 14:24. Is 55:4. Mt 11:27. Lk 10:22. 1 Jn 1:1-3. 1 Jn 5:6-12. Rev 1:5, 3:14.
- **you do not accept** Jn 3:32. Jn 1:11. Jn 5:31-40, 43. Jn 12:37, 38. Isa 49:4, 5. Isa 50:2. Isa 53:1. Ilsa 65:2. Mt 23:37. Ac 22:18. Acts 28:23-27. 2 Co 4:4.
- **our**. Ge 29:27.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## HEARING BUT NOT YET BELIEVING

The dialogue now evolves into a monologue with Jesus doing all of the speaking in this section. Although John's description of Nicodemus leads us to believe he was born again by the time Jesus was crucified, this passage (**you do not accept our testimony**) suggests that he was not born again on this night.

**Truly, truly** - For the third time Jesus doubles up His strong affirmation "[Amen, amen](#)" to emphasize to Nicodemus that what follows is valid, binding, true, trustworthy. **Morris** adds that "This time it is not the truth that one must be reborn that is underlined, but the other truth that Jesus can be relied on." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#) p220) Obviously Jesus is placing great emphasis on this discourse.

**I say to you** - Note that **you** is plural which signifies Jesus' message is for all who hear and read it. In context Jesus could have been referring to "you Pharisees" or "you Jews".

**We speak of what we know** ([eido](#)) and **testify** ([martureo](#) in [present tense](#)) of what we have seen - Goodspeed paraphrases it "we know what we are talking about!" **Know** is ([eido](#)) which speaks of intimate knowledge, beyond a shadow of a doubt knowledge, not knowledge necessarily gained by experience but given by God. **Vincent** says "**We know** means to know "absolutely, the knowledge of intuition and of satisfied conviction." **What we have seen** ([perfect tense](#) speaks of abiding "vision") is Jesus' clear declaration that He was an eyewitness Who could substantiate the truth of what He had said about the new birth. Jesus' use of **we...we...we...our** is interesting. Does it reflect an allusion to John the Baptist? Is it allusion to the OT witness of the prophets? Regardless of the meaning of the "**we...our**" Jesus is saying what He knew and what He had seen, but His words were not accepted.

**John Phillips** on **what we have seen** - The word for "**seen**" is [horao](#), usually meaning "to perceive with the eyes." The Lord was not setting before Nicodemus some fine philosophy, the fruit of reasoning and high-sounding speculation. He was setting before him hard facts, the kind of facts an eyewitness could present in a court of law. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Vincent** adds **know** or [eido](#) "is used of Christ's knowledge of divine things (Jn 3:11; Jn 5:32; Jn 7:29), of the facts of His own being (Jn 6:6; Jn 8:14; Jn 13:1), and of external facts (Jn 6:61, 64; Jn 13:11).

**Leon Morris** - Testimony" (or "witness") does not point to opinions that may be debated, but to objective fact. Jesus is not hazarding a guess, but telling Nicodemus about things of which he has perfect knowledge. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#) p220)

**And you do not accept** ([lambano](#)) **our testimony** ([martureo](#)) - **Do not** ([ou](#)) indicates [absolute negation](#) and **accept** ([lambano](#)) is in the [present tense](#) indicating that their non-acceptance was not a passing refusal but their regular habit! Notice also that Jesus makes a twofold reference to **testimony** (**we...testify...testimony**) which emphasizes the reliability of His teaching to the teacher Nicodemus. Earlier John recorded a sad summary of Jesus' ministry to Israel writing "He came to His own, and those who were His own **did not** ([ou](#) = [absolute negation](#)) **receive** ([paralambano](#)) Him." (Jn 1:11+) In this verse Jesus again uses the plural form of **you** (cf plural **you** in Jn 3:7+) indicating He is not just rebuking Nicodemus but all of unbelieving Israel. **You** Nicodemus and all like **you** do not receive our testimony.

**Constable** notes that "Nicodemus had begun the conversation by humbly referring to himself as one of many who believed that Jesus had come from God (Jn 3:2 "**we** know that You have come from God"). Now Jesus described Himself as one of several who

was speaking the truth. Evidently He was referring to the Godhead."

**MacArthur** thinks "The plurals **we** and **our** encompassed Jesus' disciples (ED: SOME THINK THEY WERE EVEN PRESENT BUT THIS IS SPECULATIVE) and even John the Baptist, who understood and testified to the truth of salvation." (Borrow [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Carson** does not think **we** refers to the disciples reasoning that "This is unlikely: at this point in their pilgrimage the disciples could not be described as speaking of what they know and testifying to what they have seen, viz. heavenly things (v. 12)." Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Hendriksen** on **we...our** - over against the "we know" of Nicodemus (Jn 3:2), a knowledge produced by human reflection, the Lord places his own "we know," a knowledge resulting from close communion with the Father (Jn 5:20; 14:10). (BNTC-Jn)

**Vincent** has an interesting explanation for **we...our** - After the use of the singular number in vv. 3, 5, 7, 12, the plural here is noteworthy. It is not merely rhetorical—"a plural of majesty"—but is explained by ver. 8, "every one that is born of the Spirit." The new birth imparts a new vision. The man who is born of the Spirit hath eternal life (ver. 36); and life eternal is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent (17:3). "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know (οἱ ὄντες) all things"\* (1 John 2:20). He who is born of water and of the Spirit sees the kingdom of God. This we therefore includes, with Jesus, all who are truly born anew of the Spirit. Jesus meets the we know of Nicodemus (ver. 2), referring to the class to which he belonged, with another we know, referring to another class, of which He was the head and representative. ([John 3 Greek Word Studies](#))

John refers to Jesus' **testimony** again in this chapter using the same verb [lambano](#)

(John 3:32+) "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one **receives** His testimony.

(John 3:33+) "He who has **received** His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.

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## Nothing But The Truth

Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen. —John 3:11

Today's Scripture: John 3:1-15

When a witness takes the stand, he is asked, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" At one time, the words "so help me God" were part of that oath, as an appeal to the highest authority. Telling the truth in a court of law is absolutely essential because it can determine a verdict of life or death.

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus about the new birth and eternal life, He spoke "under oath." Note how He prefaced His words in John 3:11, "Most assuredly, I say to you." He used the Greek phrase "amen, amen," which can also be translated "verily, verily," "truly, truly," or "I tell you the truth." In the gospel of John, Jesus used the phrase 25 times.

In his book *The Unity Of The Bible*, Daniel Fuller writes, "Jesus . . . did not speak for God but as being God Himself. Of all the biblical spokespersons, only Jesus attached amen to His own statements, thereby declaring that He Himself as God had the authority to affirm His teaching as reliable and true."

The words of our Lord are the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So believe them and obey them. Knowing the truth is a matter of life or death! Dennis J. DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, grant to me a holy zeal  
That burns within my heart,  
A zeal like Yours for truth and right  
From which I'll not depart.  
—D. De Haan

Christ Himself is the truth—we need nothing more.

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**John 3:12 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things**

NET John 3:12 If I have told you people about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

GNT John 3:12 ε τ π γεια ε πον μ ν κ α ο πιστε ετε, π ς ν ε π ω μ ν τ πουρ νια πιστε σετε;

NLT John 3:12 But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

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

ESV John 3:12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

NIV John 3:12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

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

CSB John 3:12 If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven?

NKJ John 3:12 "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

NRS John 3:12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

YLT John 3:12 if the earthly things I said to you, and ye do not believe, how, if I shall say to you the heavenly things, will ye believe?

NAB John 3:12 If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

NJB John 3:12 If you do not believe me when I speak to you about earthly things, how will you believe me when I speak to you about heavenly things?

GWN John 3:12 If you don't believe me when I tell you about things on earth, how will you believe me when I tell you about things in heaven?

BBE John 3:12 If you have no belief when my words are about the things of earth, how will you have belief if my words are about the things of heaven?

- **If.1** Co 15:2.
- **earthly.** Jn 3:3, 5, 8. Ezek 36:25-27. 1 Co 3:1, 2. 1 Cor 15:40. 2 Co 5:1. Php 2:10. Php 3:19. Col 3:2. Heb 5:11, 12. Jas 3:15. 1 Pe 2:1-3.
- **if I tell.** Mt 4:9.
- **heavenly.** Jn 3:13-17, 31-36. Jn 1:1-14. 6:51-53. Jn 8:58. Jn 10:30. 1 Co 2:7-9. Ep 1:3, 20. Eph 2:6. Eph 3:10. Eph 6:12. Ph 2:10. 1 Ti 3:16. 1 Jn 4:10, 14.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**If I told you earthly things and you do not believe** ([pisteuo](#)) - If is first class conditional assuming what follows is true. Note again that **"you"** is plural, so not just reference to Nicodemus. Earthly things does not refer to things that are worldly or sinful, but it is not clear to what Jesus refers.

**MacArthur** - Because of his refusal to believe, he could not even fathom the **earthly** truth of the new birth, not to mention profound **heavenly** realities such as the relationship of the Father to the Son (John 1:1; 17:5), God's kingdom (Matt. 25:34), or His eternal plan of redemption (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Carson** - On the face of it, the obvious candidate for **'earthly things'** is the new birth itself, the subject of Jesus' conversation so far Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Mounce** - The Jewish leaders were impressed with the signs Jesus had performed, but they stopped short of accepting him. So Jesus asks the obvious question: you do not believe me when I speak of "earthly things"; why then would you believe me if I speak of "heavenly things"? Earthly things" represent truths such as the new birth for which there is a human analogy. "Heavenly things" are truths such as the heavenly descent of the Son of Man to secure eternal salvation for all who believe (cf. vv. 13–21; 31–36)—Carson, 199, calls them, "the splendors of the consummated kingdom, and what it means to live under such glorious, ineffable rule." (EBC)

**How will you believe ([pisteuo](#)) if I tell you heavenly things** - "I have used earthly illustrations," said Jesus, "and you cannot understand. If I began to share the deep spiritual truths, you still would not believe."

**Mattoon** - These are the ABC's of the Gospel. If they could not understand these truths, then how would they begin to understand deeper truths.

**Phillips** - The things of God embrace two spheres. There are "earthly things," things with their sphere on earth. In this sense, regeneration is an earthly thing. It is something we experience on earth. Its origin is heavenly but its manifestation is earthly. There are also "heavenly things." The revelation of Jesus as the Son of God is a heavenly thing. The hope of the millennial kingdom is an earthly thing; the mystery of the kingdom of God is a heavenly thing. To grasp that spiritual side of things called for faith. If Nicodemus was having trouble with earthly truths, how could his faith rise to grasp heavenly truths? (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Carson** - if Nicodemus stumbles over this elementary point of entry, then what is the use of going on to explain more of the details of life in the kingdom? The 'heavenly things' are then the splendours of the consummated kingdom, and what it means to live under such glorious, ineffable rule. Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Constable** - The "earthly things" that Jesus had told Nicodemus involved the new birth. The new birth is earthly in that it occurs on the earth. This teaching had been elementary. However, Nicodemus had not believed it. Therefore he could not begin to believe things that Jesus might have told him about "heavenly things." These things might have included such revelations as life beyond the grave, life in the kingdom, and the new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17). If Jesus responded to everyone as He did to Nicodemus, it would mean that when a person rejects revelation he or she thereby limits the revelation that comes to that one from then on. This is really what usually happens.

**NET Note** - Obviously **earthly things** and **heavenly things** are in contrast, but what is the contrast? What are earthly things which Jesus has just spoken to Nicodemus? And through him to others - this is not the first instance of the plural pronoun, see v. 7, you must all. Since Nicodemus began with a plural (we know, v. 2) Jesus continues it, and through Nicodemus addresses a broader audience. It makes most sense to take this as a reference to the things Jesus has just said (and the things he is about to say, vv. 13–15). If this is the case (and it seems the most natural explanation) then earthly things are not necessarily strictly physical things, but are so called because they take place on earth, in contrast to things like v. 16, which take place in heaven. Some have added the suggestion that the things are called earthly because physical analogies (birth, wind, water) are used to describe them. This is possible, but it seems more probable that Jesus calls these things earthly because they happen on earth (even though they are spiritual things). In the context, taking earthly things as referring to the words Jesus has just spoken fits with the fact that Nicodemus did not believe. And he would not after hearing heavenly things either, unless he first believed in the earthly things - which included the necessity of a regenerating work from above, by the Holy Spirit.

### John 3:13 "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man"

NET John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven— the Son of Man.

GNT John 3:13 κα ο δε ζ ναβ βηκεν ε ζ τ ν ο ραν ν ε μ κ το ο ρανο καταβ ζ, υ ζ το νθρ που.

NLT John 3:13 No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven.

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

ESV John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

NIV John 3:13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man.

ASV John 3:13 And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven.

CSB John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven-- the Son of Man.

NKJ John 3:13 "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

NRS John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of

Man.

YLT John 3:13 and no one hath gone up to the heaven, except he who out of the heaven came down -- the Son of Man who is in the heaven.

NAB John 3:13 No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man.

NJB John 3:13 No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man;

GWN John 3:13 No one has gone to heaven except the Son of Man, who came from heaven.

BBE John 3:13 And no one has ever gone up to heaven but he who came down from heaven, the Son of man.

- **no man.** Jn 1:18. Jn 6:46. Dt 30:11, 12, 14. Pr 30:4. Ac 2:34. Ro 10:6-8. 1 Co 15:50. Ep 4:9, 10.
- **has ascended.** Jn 6:62. Ge 5:24 w He 11:5. 2 Ki 2:11. Mt 22:32. Lk 24:51. 2 Co 12:1-4. 1 Ti 2:5. Rev 4:1
- **Into heaven.** Ezek 28:2.
- **but He.** Jn 3:31. Jn 6:33, 38, 42, 51, 62. 8:42. 13:3. 16:28-30. 17:5. Ge 11:5. 1 Co 15:47.
- **from heaven.** Ezek 28:2.
- **even** (KJV) Jn 1:18. Mt 28:20. Mk 16:19, 20. Ac 20:28. Ep 1:23. 4:10.
- **Son of man.** Jn 1:51. 4:27. 5:27. 13:31. Ps 80:17. Da 7:13. Mt 16:27. Mt 19:28. Mt 26:64. 25:31. Mk 8:38. 13:26. Lk 9:26. 21:27.
- **which is in heaven** (KJV) Mt 2:13.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SOURCE OF JESUS' AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING

It would be very difficult for someone who had never been to Heaven to speak of heavenly things. This was not a problem for Jesus, because He had descended from Heaven. Heaven had been His home for eternity, thus He had "considerable experience" with **heavenly things**. And so Jesus proceeds to explain how it was that He could have first-hand knowledge of **heavenly things**, how He would speak so authoritatively on things invisible to and unknowable by mere men. As **Hendriksen** says "one must have been present in God's Throne-room when the decisions were made."

**No one has ascended into heaven** - The writer of Proverbs asks "Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!" Jesus is speaking of the human impossibility of ascension to Heaven.

**But He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man** - Jesus is referring to Himself and His origin from Heaven points out that He is the Messiah. No one had ever entered into heaven to experience its realities directly except Jesus himself, the Son of Man (cf. Da 7:13; Mt 26:64).

**Mounce** comments that "The more profound teachings of Jesus, i.e., those truths for which there are no analogies, have their origin in heaven, and with the one exception of the Son of Man, no one has ever gone into heaven to bring back that knowledge. Direct knowledge of heavenly things requires immediate and personal contact with the heavenly realm." (EBC)

**MacArthur** - God "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:2). He is "the bread of God ... which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world" (John 6:33; cf. Jn 6:51). "I have come down from heaven," He declared in John 6:38, "not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." In John 6:62 He asked, "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?" In John 8:42 Jesus said to His accusers, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me." John prefaced his account of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet with the statement that Jesus "had come forth from God and was going back to God" (John 13:3). Later that same evening in the Upper Room Jesus told the disciples, "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father" (John 16:28). In His High Priestly Prayer Jesus prayed, "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "The first man [Adam] is from the earth, earthy; [but] the second man [Jesus] is from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47). (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

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NET John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

GNT John 3:14 κα καθ ς Μωϋσ ς ψωσεν τ ν φιν ν τ ρ μ , ο τω ς ψωθ ναι δε τ ν υ ν το ν θρ που,

NLT John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

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

ESV John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

NIV John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

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

CSB John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

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

NRS John 3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

YLT John 3:14 'And as Moses did lift up the serpent in the wilderness, so it behoveth the Son of Man to be lifted up,

NAB John 3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

NJB John 3:14 as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up

GWN John 3:14 "As Moses lifted up the snake on a pole in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

BBE John 3:14 As the snake was lifted up by Moses in the waste land, even so it is necessary for the Son of man to be lifted up:

- **As Moses lifted up the serpent** Mt 12:40. Nu 21:7-9. 2 Ki 18:4.
- **even.** Jn 8:28. Jn 12:32-34. Ps 22:16. Mt 26:54. Lk 18:31-33. Lk 24:20, 26, 27, 44-46. Ac 2:23. 4:27, 28.
- **must.** Jn 3:30. Jn 4:4. 9:4. Jn 10:16. Jn 12:34. Jn 20:9. Lk 13:33. Ac 1:16.
- **Son** Ge 11:5.
- **lifted up.** Jn 8:28. Jn 12:32, 34. Ac 2:33. 5:31. Ph 2:9.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The Old Testament passage to which Jesus alludes:

The people spoke against God and 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 miserable food." (GRUMBLING AGAINST GOD IS DANGEROUS!) 6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died (THEY EXPERIENCED A "TASTE" OF THE WRATH OF GOD). 7 So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD (CONFESSION IS THE PLACE TO BEGIN) and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." 9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the **standard** ([05251](#) nec/nes); and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:5-9+)

## SERPENTINE TYPOLOGY

Note how Jesus goes back to the Scriptures, passages which Nicodemus likely even knew by heart and taught the teacher truths that he would have never discovered had Jesus not revealed them to him. He reveals to Nicodemus that the bronze serpent on the standard was a **Biblical type**. "A **type** in Scripture is a person or thing in the Old Testament that foreshadows a person or thing in the New Testament." ([Typology](#))

**As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness** -The bronze serpent was merely a shadow of the substance to come in Christ (Col 2:17+). It is interesting that this was the last miracle of Moses, on the borders of the promised land. The bite of the fiery serpents was uniformly fatal (sounds a lot like the effect of sin - Ro 5:12+, Ro 3:23+). The Israelites were without hope and yet they humbled themselves, confessed and sought Moses' intercession.

**Ryle** - Christ "lifted up" and put to shame on Calvary is the ladder by which Christians "enter into the holiest," and are at length landed in glory. It is true that we are sinners;—but Christ has suffered for us. It is true that we deserve death;—but Christ has died for us. It is true that we are guilty debtors;—but Christ has paid our debts with His own blood. This is the real Gospel! This is the good news! **On this let us lean while we live. To this let us cling when we die.** Christ has been "lifted up" on the cross, and has thrown open the gates of heaven to all believers.

**Carson** - That bronze snake on a pole was the means God used to give new (physical) life to the children of Israel if they were bitten in the plague of snakes that had been sent in as a punishment for the persistent murmuring. By God's provision, new life was graciously granted. Why then should it be thought so strange that by the gracious provision of this same God there should be new spiritual life, indeed 'eternal life' (v. 15)? Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Mattoon** comparing the looking at the serpent with believing in Jesus - Each man had to look for himself. No man could look for the benefit of another. It was not enough to know about the serpent. You had to look upon it. Each person must come to Christ in faith on the Lord's terms. You cannot get saved by another person's faith. You must personally put your faith in Christ. Knowing about the Lord is not enough to save you from your sins. This serpent on the pole was a picture of Jesus Christ.

**Utley** on the significance of the serpent - The central truth is that humans must trust and obey God's word, even when they do not fully understand it. God provided a way for the Israelites to be saved from the snake bites if they would only believe. This belief was evidenced by their own obedience to His word/promise. ([John 3](#))

Just as the Israelites who had been bitten by the fiery serpents looked at the bronze serpent lifted up and lived, so too whoever looks in faith alone to the crucified Christ lifted up will be saved from sin's deadly bite and will have eternal life in Christ. This is exactly what the Prince of Preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon did! He was in a primitive Baptist church by "accident" ([Providence](#)) one snowy winter morning and heard an impromptu message by a layman (the preacher was unable to come because of the storm) on Isaiah 45:22KJV

**Look** (command) unto me, and **be ye saved**, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

**COMMENT** - For many months this young teenager had been miserable and under deep conviction; but though he had been reared in church (both his father and grandfather were preachers), he did not have the assurance of salvation. The unprepared substitute minister did not have much to say, so he kept repeating the text. "A man need not go to college to learn to look," he shouted. "Anyone can look—a child can look!" About that time, he saw the visitor sitting to one side, and he pointed at him and said, "Young man, you look very miserable. Young man, look to Jesus Christ!" The young man did look by faith, and that was when Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born again. Jesus came to this world as our Saviour, and He died for us on the cross! He became the "uplifted serpent." The serpent in Moses' day brought physical life to dying Jews; but Jesus Christ gives eternal life to anyone who trusts Him. He has salvation for a whole world! Read [Spurgeon's full testimony](#). Have you looked at the Savior Who Alone cures sin's bite?

Merrill Tenney observes that "Although Jesus did not elaborate the details of this allusion, it has several applicable aspects:

1. The ancient Israelites were guilty of disobedience and a grumbling and unthankful spirit.
2. They were under the condemnation of God and were being punished for their sin.
3. The object elevated before them was the emblem of their judgment.
4. They were unable to rescue themselves.
5. The poison of the serpents was deadly, and there was no antidote for it.
6. They were urged to look at the serpent in order to receive life. (Borrow [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up** - This is Jesus' earliest recorded prediction of His death. The verb **must** is a strong term which speaks of the absolute necessity of the crucifixion for without the crucifixion of Christ there could be no new birth. **Must** means the Crucifixion of Christ was not optional but obligatory and was the primary reason He descended from Heaven. In John 12:34 Jesus said "The Son of Man **must** be lifted up?" And so for Nicodemus this was an absolute **must**. He **must** realize that in order to see or enter God's kingdom, He **must** be made alive in the spirit by the Spirit (Jn 3:8, Ro 8:11+). People **must** not stumble at or reject the importance of Jesus' unsettling words, for just as we were not in control of our first birth, we are not in control of our second birth. It is given as a gift by a direct act of God! This truth is disconcerting to many. Nevertheless, Jesus says new

birth is not the **must** of moral duty, but the **must** of divine necessity. They **must** be born from above. The **necessity** is absolute and is universally binding. Even godly, righteous, scholarly Nicodemus **must** be born again, and so **must** we dear reader! **Have you been born again?**

**Must** (1163)(**dei** from **deo** = to bind or tie together, put in prison; root of **doulos** - bond-servant) refers to what is not optional but needful (binding) out of intrinsic necessity or inevitability. **Dei** describes that which is under the necessity of happening or which must necessarily take place. Note the **must's** in John's Gospel (all are **dei**) = Jn. 3:7 = **must** of the new birth; Jn. 3:14 = **must** of Jesus' crucifixion ; Jn. 3:30 = **must** of Jesus increasing, John decreasing ; Jn. 4:4 = **must** of Jesus going through Samaria; Jn. 4:24 = **must** of the proper worship of God; Jn. 9:4 = **must** of Jesus' work while there was time; Jn. 10:16 = the **must** of saving Gentiles in addition to Jews; Jn. 12:34 = the **must** of the Cross.

**Lifted up** (5312)(**hupsoo** from **hupsos** = height, elevation) means to lift up spatially, to raise high and figuratively describes lifting one up to a place of honor, fame, power, or position (to exalt). Both senses apply to Jesus on the Cross! **Hupsoo** is used in John's Gospel 4 times and all refer the **crucifixion** (Jn 3:14, Jn 8:26, Jn 12:32, Jn 12:34). But in a sense hupsoo has a "double meaning" referring not only to His crucifixion but also His exaltation to heaven. John points out that our Lord's crucifixion was actually the means of His glorification (see Jn 12:23-27 especially Jn 12:28). The CROSS was not the end of His glory; it was the means of His glory. Luke writes "Therefore **having been exalted** to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." (Acts 2:33+).

**John Phillips** thinks that "The full truth of that probably did not dawn on Nicodemus until Christ was nailed to the cross-perhaps it was then he cast his doubts and difficulties aside and threw in his lot with the Lord." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

The whole world has been bitten by sin, and "the wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23+). God sent His Son to die, not only for Israel, but for a whole world. How is a person born from above? How is he or she saved from eternal perishing? By believing on Jesus Christ; by looking to Him in faith.

**What Happened to the Bronze Serpent on the Standard?** In a word, it became an idol to the Israelites! This piece of bronze was preserved for almost 730 years, until the days of the rule of King Hezekiah (715-686 BC). And so we read that Hezekiah

removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. **He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent** that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan. (2 Ki 18:4)

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**King Hezekiah** broke it in pieces because the people were worshipping it. In contempt he gave it the name **Nehushtan** (a play on the word **nahas**, 'serpent'), meaning a 'trifling thing', or a "mere piece of brass," because it had become an object of worship. Hezekiah probably gave this name as a sign of his contempt. King Hezekiah's destruction of this idol gives us a good OT illustration of Paul's charge in Romans 13:14+ to "**put on** ([aorist imperative See discussion of the Need for the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Israel had been using the Bronze Serpent on the Standard to make provision for their flesh. No other details of this idolatrous veneration are given but it is notable that when idolatry is mentioned in Scripture, immorality is often closely associated!

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**Question:** [What was Nehushtan?](#)

**Answer:** The word *Nehushtan* occurs one time in the Bible, in 2 Kings 18:4, "He [Hezekiah] removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the [bronze serpent](#) that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan)."

Second Kings 18:4 points back to Numbers 21:6-9, "Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 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. 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.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."

In the time between Moses and Hezekiah, the Israelites began worshipping the "fiery serpent" Moses made out of bronze. It is only mentioned in connection with Hezekiah's reforms, but the Nehushtan worship could have been taking place long before Hezekiah. While it is understandable how an item that brought miraculous healing could become an object of worship, it was still blatant disobedience to God's commands (Exodus 20:4-5). The bronze serpent was God's method of deliverance during the incident recorded in Number 21. There is no indication that God intended it to ever be used again.



While He does not refer to it as “Nehushtan,” Jesus does mention the bronze serpent in John 3:14, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Just as anyone who was bitten by a serpent could be healed by looking to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up, so can anyone look to Jesus, who was lifted up on the cross, to be spiritually healed, delivered, and saved.

Interestingly, the word *Nehushtan* appears to simply mean “piece of brass.” Perhaps Hezekiah named it “Nehushtan” to remind people that it was only a piece of brass. It had no power in it. Even in the Numbers 21 incident, it was God who healed, not Nehushtan.

Nehushtan should be a powerful reminder to us all that even good things—and good people—can become idols in our lives. Our praise, worship, and adoration are to be directed to God alone. Nothing else, regardless of its amazing history, is worthy. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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#### Related Resources:

- [Why is a bronze serpent used to save the Israelites in Numbers 21:8-9?](#)
  - [Typology - Study of Types \(including caveats\)](#)
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#### Rob Mattoon The Brazen Serpent.... A Picture of Christ

1. The brazen serpent was made like a fiery serpent, yet, without a sting. Christ was made like unto sinful man, yet without sin.
  - 2 Corinthians 5:21+—For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.
  - Romans 8:3+—For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:
2. The serpent was cursed in the Garden of Eden. Christ was made a curse for us, taking the sin of the world upon Himself. He identified Himself with our guilt so that we might be identified with Him in glory.
  - Galatians 3:13+—Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:
3. Brass in the Bible is a symbol or picture of judgment. The judgment of God was upon Jesus Christ because He bore our sins. Brass was actually copper. The red serpent was a reminder of the blood that Christ shed upon the cross.
4. As the metal passed through the furnace to be molded in the form of a serpent, the Captain of our Salvation brought deliverance through His suffering.
  - Hebrews 2:10+—For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
5. Both the serpent and Christ were lifted up as objects of faith and deliverance to those who were dying. The words "lifted up" are from the Greek word *hupsoo* {hoop-so'-o}. This word was used of being lifted up on the cross and being lifted up into glory at the time of His ascension. It means "to exalt or raise to a place of honor." The cross lifted up Christ to a place of glory.
  - John 12:23—And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.
6. The cure of the brazen serpent was unknown to reason and it was simple. All they had to do is look by faith. Salvation is simple too. The Christian life begins by looking to the Lord for salvation.
  - Isaiah 45:22—Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

We are to continue to look to the Lord all throughout our lives until the very end of it. We are to be lifting Him up or magnifying Him.

- Hebrews 12:2+—Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- Philippians 1:20+—According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all

boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

- Philippians 3:20+—For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

7. We receive eternal or everlasting life by looking to the Lord. Eternal life deals not only with the quantity of life, but the quality of life. Eternal life gives peace with God and with men. Since we are forgiven, we must be forgiving. We are to see men as God sees them. Eternal life gives us peace in this life and with ourselves. In spite of our trials or weaknesses, we face them with the Lord at our side. Let me ask, "Are you lifting up the Lord in your life?"

Salvation may come quietly, but we must not remain quiet about it.

### John 3:15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life

NET John 3:15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

GNT John 3:15 να πιστεωv ατχ ζωv αvιωv.

NLT John 3:15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

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

ESV John 3:15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

NIV John 3:15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

ASV John 3:15 that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.

CSB John 3:15 so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

NKJ John 3:15 "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

NRS John 3:15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

YLT John 3:15 that every one who is believing in him may not perish, but may have life age-during,

NAB John 3:15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

NJB John 3:15 so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

GWN John 3:15 Then everyone who believes in him will have eternal life."

BBE John 3:15 So that whoever has faith may have in him eternal life.

- **whoever.** Jn 3:16, 36. Jn 1:12. Jn 6:40, 47. Jn 11:25, 26. Jn 12:44-46. Jn 20:31. Isa 45:22 ([Verse that Spirit used to save C H Spurgeon](#)). Mk 16:16. Ac 8:37. 10:34, 35. Acts 16:30, 31. Ro 4:23-25. Ro 5:1, 2. Ro 10:9-14. Gal 2:16, 20. Gal 3:11. He 7:25. Heb 10:39. 1 Jn 5:1, 1 Jn 5:11-13.
- **believes.** Jn 5:44.
- **in Him.** Jn 15:4. 16:33. 1 Jn 5:12, 20. not. Jn 5:24. ✓ 10:28-30. Mt +\*18:11. Lk +\*19:10. Ac 13:41. 1 Co 1:18. 2 Co 4:3.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**So that** ([hina](#)) - This [term of purpose](#) expresses the purpose of the Son of Man being lifted up, being crucified (Jn 3:14). The purpose was the salvation of all who believed (Who "looked" to Jesus).

Carson - Here then is the frankest answer to Nicodemus' question. 'How can this happen?' (Jn 3:9). The kingdom of God is seen or entered, new birth is experienced, and eternal life begins, through the saving cross-work of Christ, received by faith Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Whoever believes** - **Whoever** flings open the possibility of entering the gates of Heaven to sinners otherwise destined foreternal punishment in Hell. Jn 3:16 repeats the offer to "**whoever**." In Romans 10:11+ Paul writes " the Scripture says, "**WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.**" **Believes** is in the [present tense](#) which speaks of continuing belief. We believe on Jesus at a moment in time and are born again, but we continue thereafter to believe in Him.

**Believes** (4100)([pisteuo](#)) means to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. To accept as true, genuine, or real. To have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something or someone. To consider to be true. To accept the word or evidence of. "The belief is certainly belief in Jesus Christ, including confidence in the truthfulness of his teaching." (Carson Borrow [The Gospel according to](#)

[John](#))

**Pisteuo** is a key verb in John's Gospel used 98x - Jn. 1:7; Jn. 1:12; Jn. 1:50; Jn. 2:11; Jn. 2:22; Jn. 2:23; Jn. 2:24; Jn. 3:12; Jn. 3:15; Jn. 3:16; Jn. 3:18; Jn. 3:36; Jn. 4:21; Jn. 4:39; Jn. 4:41; Jn. 4:42; Jn. 4:48; Jn. 4:50; Jn. 4:53; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 5:38; Jn. 5:44; Jn. 5:46; Jn. 5:47; Jn. 6:29; Jn. 6:30; Jn. 6:35; Jn. 6:36; Jn. 6:40; Jn. 6:47; Jn. 6:64; Jn. 6:69; Jn. 7:5; Jn. 7:31; Jn. 7:38; Jn. 7:39; Jn. 7:48; Jn. 8:24; Jn. 8:30; Jn. 8:31; Jn. 8:45; Jn. 8:46; Jn. 9:18; Jn. 9:35; Jn. 9:36; Jn. 9:38; Jn. 10:25; Jn. 10:26; Jn. 10:37; Jn. 10:38; Jn. 10:42; Jn. 11:15; Jn. 11:25; Jn. 11:26; Jn. 11:27; Jn. 11:40; Jn. 11:42; Jn. 11:45; Jn. 11:48; Jn. 12:11; Jn. 12:36; Jn. 12:37; Jn. 12:38; Jn. 12:39; Jn. 12:42; Jn. 12:44; Jn. 12:46; Jn. 13:19; Jn. 14:1; Jn. 14:10; Jn. 14:11; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 14:29; Jn. 16:9; Jn. 16:27; Jn. 16:30; Jn. 16:31; Jn. 17:8; Jn. 17:20; Jn. 17:21; Jn. 19:35; Jn. 20:8; Jn. 20:25; Jn. 20:29; Jn. 20:31;

**Will in Him have - Will have** is in the [present tense](#) speaking of the continuation of this new life. Note the Source of **eternal life** is Christ. The believer's life is in essence a Person Who is eternal.

**Carson** - those who have read the Prologue will recall that life resides in the Word: 'in him was life' (Jn 1:4+). The eternal life begun by the new birth is nothing less than the eternal life of the eternal Word. Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Eternal life** - Ageless or endless life! This is the first of 15 references to **eternal life** in John's gospel (Jn. 3:15; Jn. 3:16; Jn. 3:36; Jn. 4:14; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 5:39; Jn. 6:27; Jn. 6:40; Jn. 6:47; Jn. 6:54; Jn. 6:68; Jn. 10:28; Jn. 12:50; Jn. 17:2; Jn. 17:3; ). **Eternal life** refers not only to eternal quantity but divine quality of life. It can mean literally "**life of the age to come**" and refers therefore to resurrection, glorification and heavenly existence in perfect glory and holiness. However this life for believers in the Lord Jesus is meant to be experienced and enjoyed before heaven! This "**eternal life**" is participation in the eternal life of the Living Word, Jesus Christ (cf Paul in Gal 2:20+). It is the life of God, by the Spirit of Jesus in every believer, which will only be fully manifest when we receive our resurrection bodies (cf Ro 8:19–23+; Phil. 3:20, 21+).

In essence **eternal life** parallels **kingdom of God** in Jn 3:3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the **kingdom of God.**" and in John 3:5 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the **kingdom of God.**" Entrance in to the **Kingdom of God** is also entrance into **eternal life**. John only mentions Kingdom of God only in these 2 passages in John 3, but mentions **eternal life** 15 times and in each of these uses one could think of the "**Kingdom of God.**" **Kingdom of God** is clearly more comprehensible to a Jewish person, and conveys details that would be especially significant for a Jewish person for they had been taught that Messiah would bring in the "age to come," the Kingdom of the Messiah.

**Robertson** on **eternal life** - It is more than endless, for it is sharing in the life of God in Christ (Jn 5:26; Jn 17:3; 1 John 5:12 = He who has the Son has the life;).

**Mounce** - "eternal life is the life of the age to come which is gained by faith, cannot be destroyed, and is a present possession of the one who believes."

*The life Christians possess is not in any sense independent of Christ. It is a life that is "hidden with Christ in God"*

**Leon Morris** - The **life** Christians possess is not in any sense independent of Christ. It is a **life** that is "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3+)...In the Prologue he has informed us that **life** is "in" the Logos, and much the same thought is found here, with the addition that the lifting up of the Son of man is an integral part of the process whereby the **life** is mediated to believers. The word rendered "**eternal**" (always in this Gospel used of **life**) basically means "pertaining to an age." The Jews divided time into the **present age** and the **age to come**, but the adjective was used of **life** in the coming age, not that of the present age. "**Eternal life**" thus means "the life proper to the age to come." It is an eschatological concept (cf. Jn 6:40, 54). But as the age to come is thought of as never coming to an end the adjective came to mean "everlasting," "eternal." The notion of time is there. **Eternal life** will never cease. But there is something else there, too, and something more significant. The important thing about **eternal life** is not its quantity but its quality. In Westcott's phrase, "It is not an endless duration of being in time, but being of which time is not a measure." **Eternal life** is life in Christ, that life which removes a person from the merely earthly. As we see from the earlier part of this chapter, it originates in a divine action, the action wherein one is born anew. It is the gift of God, and not a human achievement. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#) p226)

**Jesus** said (in His prayer to His Father) that "This is **eternal life**, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent". (John 17:3)

**Our Daily Bread Devotionals related to John 3:15**

- [John 3:15 Life's Greatest Moment](#)

- [John 3:15 Generous Receivers](#)
- [John 3:15 Everyone Needs Jesus](#)

**John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"**

NET John 3:16 For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

GNT John 3:16 Ο τω ς γ ρ γ πη ς εν θε ς τ ν κ σ μ ο ν , σ τ ε τ ν υ ν τ ν μ ο ν ο γ ε ν δ ω κ ε ν , ν α π ς π ι σ τ ε ω ν ε ς α τ ν μ π λ η τ α ι λ λ χ ζ ω ν α ν ι ο ν .

NLT John 3:16 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

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

ESV John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

NIV John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

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

CSB John 3:16 "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

NKJ John 3:16 "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.

NRS John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

YLT John 3:16 for God did so love the world, that His Son -- the only begotten -- He gave, that every one who is believing in him may not perish, but may have life age-during.

NAB John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

NJB John 3:16 For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

GWN John 3:16 God loved the world this way: He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.

BBE John 3:16 For God had such love for the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever has faith in him may not come to destruction but have eternal life.

- **God.** Je 31:3. Lk 2:14. Ro ✓5:8. 2 Co 5:19-21. Ep 2:4-7. 2 Th 2:16. Ti 3:4-7. 1 Jn 3:1, 4:9, 10, 14, 19. Re 1:5.
- **loved.** Ge 4:1.
- **world.** Mt 4:8. Jn 1:9, 29. 4:42. Ge 24:10. Jn 7:4. Ac 17:31. 2 Co 5:19. 1 Jn 2:2. 5:19. Rev 12:9.
- **gave.** Ge 4:1. Jn 1:14, 18. Ge 22:12. Is 9:6. Mk 12:6. Ro 5:10. 8:32.
- **only.** Jn 3:18. Jn 1:14. Ge 22:2,12. Lk 7:12.
- **begotten.** 1 Jn 5:18.
- **Son.** Jn 3:35. Jn 5:25. Is 9:6. t
- **whoever.** Jn 3:15. Mt 9:13. 1 Ti 1:15, 16. Rev 22:17.
- **believes** John 3:18, 36. Jn 1:12, Jn 4:39, 5:44, 6:35, 47. Jn 12:46. 20:29. Isa 28:16. Isa 45:22. Mt 11:28. Mk 9:23. Lk 7:50. Acts 10:43, 16:31. Ro 1:16. Ro 4:5. Ro 9:33. Ro 10:4. Ga 3:7, 9, 22. Ep 2:8-10. 1 Ti 4:10. He 6:12. Heb 10:38, 39. 1 Pe 2:4-6.
- **in him.** Jn 15:4. Jn 16:33. 1 Jn 5:12, 20.
- **perish.** Mt 2:13. Jn 10:28. Lk 19:10. 23:35. 2 Pe 3:9.

- **eternal.** Mt 18:8. Jn 17:2, 3. Ro 5:21. Ro 6:22, 23. 1 Jn 2:25. 1 Jn 5:13, 20.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE BEST KNOWN VERSE IN THE WORLD

**Rod Mattoon** has a sermon on John 3:16 entitled "The Magnifying Glass of God's Love" and opens with an illustration - A gem dealer was strolling the aisles at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked the vendor, "You want \$15 for this?" The seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10. The stone has since been certified as a 1,905-carat natural star sapphire, about 800 carats larger than the largest stone of its kind. It was appraised at \$2.28 million. It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire's worth. It took the Lover of Souls, the Lord Jesus Christ, to recognize the true value of ordinary-looking people like us. The love that God has for us is summarized in a nutshell in this well-known verse of the Bible. John 3:16 is the magnifying glass of God's love for mankind. If there was one verse that summarized the heart of the Bible, this would probably be the verse. All of the highways of divine truth meet in this metropolis. John 3:16 is the hub of revealed truth. For this reason it is one of the first verses translated into other languages of the Bible. Gaylord Kambarami, the General Secretary of the Bible Society in Zimbabwe, tried to give a New Testament to a very belligerent man. The man insisted he would roll the pages and use them to make cigarettes. Mr. Kambarami said, "I understand that, but at least promise to read the page of the New Testament before you smoke it." The man agreed, and the two went their separate ways. Fifteen years later, the two men met at a Methodist convention in Zimbabwe. The scripture-smoking pagan had found Christ and was now a full-time evangelist. He told the audience, "I smoked Matthew and I smoked Mark and I smoked Luke. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke anymore. My life was changed from that moment." Aren't you glad God's book is more than just words on paper?"

**For (gar)** is a term of explanation. John is explaining the phrase "whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." (Jn 3:15) He is explaining His Father's motive for offering the gift of eternal life to the spiritually dead. And so what is God's motive? LOVE!

**God so loved (agapao) the world (kosmos)** - The Son's mission is bound up in the supreme love of God for the evil, sinful **'world'** of humanity (Jn 6:32, 51; Jn 12:47; Jn 1:9; Mt 5:44, 45) that is in rebellion against Him. Ethnically speaking the **world** is divided into Jews and Gentiles. And so undoubtedly this statement by Jesus would rock Nicodemus' worldview, for like all Jews of his day, he was in essence a "racist," and harbored an abhorrence of the Gentiles. But now Jesus makes **eternal life** a possibility not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles.

**Leon Morris** - 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 people. His **love** is not confined to any national group or spiritual elite. It is a love that proceeds from the fact that he is love (1 John 4:8, 16). It is his nature to love. He loves people because he is the kind of God he is. John tells us that his love is shown in the gift of his Son....in recent times some scholars have argued that John sees God's love as only for believers, but here it is plain that God loves **"the world."** (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#) 228)

**McGarvey** says this about John 3:16: It is a lesson as to God's love:

1. **Its magnitude** — he gave his only begotten Son.
2. **Its reach** — he gave to a sinful world (Rom 5:8).
3. **Its impartiality** — he gives to whomsoever; that is, to all alike (Mt 5:45; Rev 22:17).
4. **Its beneficial richness** — it blesses with life eternal.
5. **Its limitation** — it is nowhere said that God so loves that he will save unbelievers.

**John Phillips** - We have now arrived at the great metropolis of gospel truth. No other single statement in the Bible so aptly sums up God's redemptive purpose in Christ for the human race. Volumes have been written on it. Its each and every word has been weighed and examined and marveled at and preached on. Who will ever know until the judgment seat of Christ how many millions of Adam's ruined race have found their way to heaven by the discovery of John 3:16? The text itself revolves around ten words: God, loved, world, gave, Son, whosoever, believeth, perish, have, life. Those ten words make up the "constellation of the redeemer" in the firmament of divine revelation. The creative work of God is summed up in ten commandments in Genesis 1 ("And God said"). The legislative work of God is summed up in ten commandments in Exodus 20. The redemptive work of God is summed up in ten words here in John 3:16. (Borrow [Exploring John page 70](#))

**So (houtos)** emphasizes the intensity or greatness of His love. It means to the degree that, to the end that or in this way. And what is that end or degree? The Father gave His unique and beloved Son to die on behalf on sinful men (2Co 5:21±). Stated another way,

the extent of God's love for the world was measured by the extent of His gift. The greatest demonstration of God's love was to give the One He loved most, His beloved one of a kind, unique Son! Paul says that "what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, **God did: sending His own Son** in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh." (Ro 8:3+)

**Leon Morris** adds that ""The Greek construction puts some emphasis on the actuality of the gift: it is not 'God loved enough to give,' but 'God loved so that he gave.' His love is not a vague, sentimental feeling, but a love that costs. God gave what was most dear to him." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John 228](#))

**Constable** - The construction of the Greek sentence stresses the intensity of God's love. He gave His best, His unique and loved Son. The Jews believed that God loved the children of Israel, but John affirmed that God loved all people regardless of race. There is nothing in this verse or in the context that would limit "the world" to the world of the elect. This love of God is amazing not so much because the world is so big as because it is so bad (cf. 1:9). The Father loves the world with the selfless love that provided the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. Galatians 2:20+ reveals that the Cross shows the Son's love....The fact that God allows sinners to perish does not contradict His love. He has provided a way by which they need not perish because He loves mankind. His ultimate purpose is the salvation of those who believe in His Son.

**Loved** ([agapao](#)) is [aorist tense](#) which speaks of a completed action in the past, in context referring to God's act of sending His Son. It gives a glimpse into the infinite heart of God. Notice this description demonstrates that **love** is not just a feeling but is associated with action. It is easy to say I love you, but God showed that He loved the world by sending His Son. God's love was a costly love!

**John Phillips** - We recoil in horror at the zeal for the virgin Mary that led Alfonso Maria dei Liguori to write in his book, The Glories of Mary (1750): "Mary so loved the world that she gave her only begotten Son." (Quoted by T. C. Hammond, The One Hundred Texts, London: The Society for Irish Church Missions, 1939, p. 18.) No, indeed. It is God Who thus loved the world....This is love that is stronger than death, the love that will not let me go, the love that many waters cannot quench, the love that suffers long and is kind, the love that never fails, the love that passes knowledge. (Borrow [Exploring John page 70](#))

**D A Carson** - The **world** ([kosmos](#)) is so wicked that John elsewhere forbids Christians to love it or anything in it (1 Jn. 2:15-17). There is no contradiction between this prohibition and the fact that God does love it. Christians are not to love the world with the selfish love of participation; God loves the world with the self-less, costly love of redemption. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**J C Ryle** says here Jesus describes "the original source from which man's salvation springs. That source is the **love** of God the Father....This wonderful verse has been justly called by Luther, "The Bible in miniature." No part of it, perhaps, is so deeply important as the first five words, "**God so loved the world.**" ...The **love** here spoken of is not that special love with which the Father regards His own elect, but that mighty pity and compassion with which He regards the whole race of mankind. Its object is not merely the little flock which He has given to Christ from all eternity, but the whole "world" of sinners, without any exception. There is a deep sense in which God loves that world. All whom He has created He regards with pity and compassion. Their sins He cannot love;— but He loves their souls. "His tender mercies are over all His works." (Psal. 145:9.) Christ is God's gracious gift to the whole world....It is not true that God cares for none but His own elect, or that Christ is not offered to any but those who are ordained to eternal life....God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is not willing that any should perish. God would have all men to be saved. God loves the world. (John 6:32; Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Ezek. 33:11.)

**That He gave** (aorist tense, active voice = volitional choice) **His only begotten** ([monogenes](#)) **Son** - **Gave** is *didomi* which refers to the bestowing of favor by One in a superior position to one in an inferior position. God made the choice to give, a choice He did not have to make (amazing grace!). But as we see even in everyday life, one can refuse this gift. The fact that it is a gift underscores God's grace which describes giving us what we do not deserve, while His mercy is not giving us what we do deserve (God's wrath/judgment). **Only begotten** ([monogenes](#)) emphasizes the uniqueness, the greatness and costliness of His Son, the Gift! The idea of **only begotten** has less to do with birth and places more emphasis on the fact that Jesus is "One of a kind!" Jesus is "The One and only!" For those of us who recognize the goodness and greatness of God's Gift, we can exclaim with Paul "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Co 9:15+)

*The truth before us is the very foundation-stone of the Christian religion.*

*Christ's death is the Christian's life.*

-- J C Ryle

**Leon Morris** - In typical Johannine fashion "**gave**" is used in two senses. God **gave** the Son by sending him into the world, but God also **gave** the Son on the cross. Notice that the cross is not said to show us the **love** of the Son (as in Gal. 2:20+), but that of the Father. The atonement proceeds from the loving heart of God. It is not something wrung from Him. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John 228](#))

## THE MEANS OF SALVATION: SOLA FIDE

**Sola Fide** is the great word of the reformers. As Gotquestions says ""faith alone," is important because it is one of the distinguishing characteristics or key points that separate the true biblical Gospel from false gospels. At stake is the very Gospel itself and it is therefore a matter of eternal life or death. Getting the Gospel right is of such importance that the Apostle Paul would write in Galatians 1:9+, "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" Paul was addressing the same question that sola fide addresses—on what basis is man declared by God to be justified? Is it by faith alone or by faith combined with works? Paul makes it clear in Galatians and Romans that man is "justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law" (Galatians 2:16+), and the rest of the Bible concurs." (See [Sola Fide](#))

**That** ([hina](#)) introduces a purpose clause, which should always prompt a question such as "What purpose?, etc"

**Whoever** - Note the pronoun **whoever** (cf **whoever** in Jn 3:15) which flings open the gates of paradise to for this pronoun means any person who or anyone that.

**Believes** ([pisteuo](#)) **in Him** -This is the means of salvation. As the reformers said "[Sola Fide](#)" and "[Sola Christos](#)". The belief is **in Him** which is a shorthand way of saying believing everything about Him, that He was fully Man, fully God, that He was without sin, that He died on the Cross as our substitute for our sins, and that God showed He was satisfied with His Son's "sin offering" by raising Him from the dead. Stated succinctly the means of salvation is belief in the **Gospel of His Son** (Ro 1:9), the **Gospel of Christ** (Ro 15:19, 1 Cor 9:12, 2 Cor 2:12, 2 Cor 9:13, 2 Cor 10:14, Gal 1:7, Phil 1:27, 1 Th 3:2), the **Gospel of our Lord Jesus** (2 Th 1:8).

**John Phillips** - The damning sin, the ultimate sin God will not forgive, is the sin of refusing to trust his Son. That is the greatest insult one can offer the Lord, to say to him verbally or otherwise, "I can't trust you." When someone came to D. L. Moody on one occasion with the excuse, "I can't believe," Mr. Moody asked, "Whom can't you believe?" (Borrow [Exploring John page 74](#))

**Constable** - The consequences of belief are new birth (Jn 3:3, 5), eternal life (Jn 3:15–16), and salvation (Jn 3:17). The alternative is perishing (Jn 3:16, cf. Jn 10:28), losing one's life (Jn 12:25), and destruction (Jn 17:12).

**D A Carson** - Whoever believes in him experiences new birth (Jn 3:3, 5), has eternal life (Jn 3:15, 16), is saved (Jn 3:17); the alternative is to perish (cf. also Jn 10:28), to lose one's life (Jn 12:25), to be doomed to destruction (Jn 17:12, cognate with 'to perish'). There is no third option. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John,206](#))

*Endurance to the end simply demonstrates  
that one's belief in Christ was genuine at the beginning!*

**Believes** ([pisteuo](#)) is [present tense](#) indicating continuing to believe. But don't misunderstand and think we are saved by our continuing belief (as if it were a meritorious work). What it does mean is that the soul in whom all things have been made new, who is truly a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17+), will continue to believe in the One Who saved him or her. The one who endures to the end will be saved (Heb 3:6+, Heb 3:14+, Mt 24:13+ - see [perseverance of the saints](#)). Our faith may wax and wane but we continue to **believe** because God's Spirit lives in us energizing us and enabling us to believe until the end of our earthly life. Endurance to the end simply demonstrates that one's belief in Christ was genuine at the beginning!

## GOD'S EARNEST DESIRE

**Shall not perish** ([apollumi](#)) - The word perish should make every sinner tremble! This in a sense is a conditional promise, conditioned on whether or not one believes in God's **only begotten Son**. **Perish** does not mean annihilate or cease to exist but to cease to have opportunity to fulfill the purpose for which one was created, which ultimately is to glorify God (see [Chief End of Man](#)). There is not one Bible passage that say **apollumi** signifies cessation of conscious existence or of consciousness. So not only does perish mean eternal loss of purpose but even worse eternal loss of fellowship with God their Creator! Paul writes that "those who do not know God and to those who do not obey (NOT WORKS, BUT BELIEF THAT LEADS TO OBEDIENCE) the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Th 1:8) "will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, **away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power**, (2 Th 1:9) (It breaks my heart to write this tragic truth about men and women created in the image of God!)

**THOUGHT** - This truth is important as some well known writers such as Clark Pinnock ([see quote](#)) and John Stott ([article on his belief](#)) have introduced **annihilation** in place of eternal punishment! But is that what Jesus taught? Here are Jesus' own words where He describes punishment and life with the same word, **eternal** -

"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mt 25:46) [Apollumi](#) indicates here that state of conscious suffering which continues eternally and is the inevitable result of sin. (See also [Is annihilationism biblical?](#))

**John Phillips** - "perish" and "life," the unutterable lostness of those who die in their sins and the unending life of those who die in the Savior; two eternal destinies, hell and heaven, with a great gulf forever fixed between banishment and bliss, the extremes of horror and happiness, the terminus of two roads: the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to everlasting life. ... (ON PERISH) God threatens to allow sin to complete its work beyond the grave by destroying the soul. The soul does not perish like the body; the soul is immortal. Sinners take with them into eternity unquenchable thirsts, terrible passions and appetites, mad cravings and inflamed desires, fierce longings and furious hates, lusts and loathings, white-hot temper and spine-chilling fear. Those destructive character traits will continue to ravage the soul and will never be either satisfied or stilled. (Borrow [Exploring John page 72](#))

**Steven Cole** - Many years ago, I conducted a funeral for a man from my church in California. On the brochure that the funeral home prints for such occasions was John 3:16, cited as follows: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life." But they left out some crucial words: "**shall not perish but have eternal life**"! I don't know whether the family or the funeral home was responsible for the omission, but I didn't let it go. I pointed out during the service that while God has provided forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believe in Jesus, the verse also warns that all who do not believe in Jesus will perish.

Mark it down that this is the WILL OF GOD. Peter affirms this great truth about God's will declaring that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing (boulomai) for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**" (2 Pe 3:9+).

**But (alla)** is a strong term of contrast. What is Jesus contrasting? **Perish (apollumi)** versus **eternal (aionios) life (zoe)**. While this section does not "quantitate" **perish**, clearly in other passages it speaks of eternal death. At the [Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats](#) on earth when He returns to set up His Millennial Kingdom, Jesus says in Mt 25:46 "These (non-believers who are perishing) will go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**." Every soul of man will spend eternity either in a state of spiritual death or spiritual life based on whether they receive or reject the gift of salvation in Jesus.

*Natural life came by God's breath.*

*Eternal life comes by Christ's death.*

**Have eternal (aionios) life (zoe)** - **Have** is in the [present tense](#) signifying that (1) it is the believer's present possession and privilege and (2) it will continue forever and ever. Amen. John 5:24+ emphasizes that eternal life occurs the moment one believes writing "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (cf from darkness to light - Col 1:12,13+, Acts 26:18+)." In his first epistle John writes "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (1 John 5:20+) Paul further explains that this **life** is in fact a Person for "Christ (is) our life." (Col 3:4+).

**Phillips** observes that "this great sentence, which summarizes the whole gospel story, begins with God and ends with everlasting life. It begins with one who had no beginning. It ends with that which has no ending." (See below - The greatest Being...the greatest blessing!) (Borrow [Exploring John page 74](#))

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**Loved (25)(agapao)** means to love unconditionally and sacrificially as God Himself loves sinful men (John 3:16), the way He loves the Son (John 3:35, 15:9, 17:23, 24). This quality of love is not an emotion but is an action initiated by a volitional choice. Agapao "speaks of a love which is awakened by a sense of value in an object which causes one to prize it. It springs from an apprehension of the preciousness of an object. It is a love of esteem and approbation. The quality of this love is determined by the character of the one who loves, and that of the object loved." (Wuest) **Agapao** "expresses the purest, noblest form of love, which is volitionally driven, not motivated by superficial appearance, emotional attraction, or sentimental relationship." (MacArthur) "The world, fallen and rebellious human beings in general, does not and cannot love God (Jn 3:19; Jn 5:42; Jn 8:42)" (Carson Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Agapao** is used by John 36x in the Gospel and 31x in the epistles far more than any other NT writer - Jn. 3:16; Jn. 3:19; Jn. 3:35; Jn. 8:42; Jn. 10:17; Jn. 11:5; Jn. 12:43; Jn. 13:1; Jn. 13:23; Jn. 13:34; Jn. 14:15; Jn. 14:21; Jn. 14:23; Jn. 14:24; Jn. 14:28; Jn. 14:31; Jn. 15:9; Jn. 15:12; Jn. 15:17; Jn. 17:23; Jn. 17:24; Jn. 17:26; Jn. 19:26; Jn. 21:7; Jn. 21:15; Jn. 21:16; Jn. 21:20; And in his epistles and Revelation - 1 Jn. 2:10; 1 Jn. 2:15; 1 Jn. 3:10; 1 Jn. 3:11; 1 Jn. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:23; 1 Jn. 4:7; 1 Jn. 4:8; 1 Jn. 4:10; 1 Jn. 4:11; 1 Jn. 4:12; 1 Jn. 4:19; 1 Jn. 4:20; 1 Jn. 4:21; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:2; 2 Jn. 1:1; 2 Jn. 1:5; 3 Jn. 1:1;



**World** (Jn 3:16, 17, 19)(2889)(**kosmos** related to the verb **kosmeo** = to order or adorn, to put in order, to adorn figuratively Titus 2:9± thus Eng - "cosmetic") means essentially something that is well-arranged, that which has order or something arranged harmoniously. In the present passage the word is used as a **metonym** (word denoting one thing but referring to a related thing) for the inhabitants of the earth, for mankind. "The whole cosmos of men, including Gentiles, the whole human race. This universal aspect of God's love appears also in 2 Cor. 5:19; Romans 5:8." (Robertson) **Kosmos** is also used in Jn 3:17 and Jn 3:19).

John 1:9-10+ There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the **world**, and the **world** was made through Him, and the **world** did not know Him.

John 1:29+ The next day he \*saw Jesus coming to him and \*said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the **world**!"

John 15:19 "If you were of the **world**, the **world** would love its own; but because you are not of the **world**, but I chose you out of the **world**, because of this the **world** hates you.

John's numerous uses of **kosmos** - Jn. 1:9; Jn. 1:10; Jn. 1:29; Jn. 3:16; Jn. 3:17; Jn. 3:19; Jn. 4:42; Jn. 6:14; Jn. 6:33; Jn. 6:51; Jn. 7:4; Jn. 7:7; Jn. 8:12; Jn. 8:23; Jn. 8:26; Jn. 9:5; Jn. 9:39; Jn. 10:36; Jn. 11:9; Jn. 11:27; Jn. 12:19; Jn. 12:25; Jn. 12:31; Jn. 12:46; Jn. 12:47; Jn. 13:1; Jn. 14:17; Jn. 14:19; Jn. 14:22; Jn. 14:27; Jn. 14:30; Jn. 14:31; Jn. 15:18; Jn. 15:19; Jn. 16:8; Jn. 16:11; Jn. 16:20; Jn. 16:21; Jn. 16:28; Jn. 16:33; Jn. 17:5; Jn. 17:6; Jn. 17:9; Jn. 17:11; Jn. 17:13; Jn. 17:14; Jn. 17:15; Jn. 17:16; Jn. 17:18; Jn. 17:21; Jn. 17:23; Jn. 17:24; Jn. 17:25; Jn. 18:20; Jn. 18:36; Jn. 18:37; Jn. 21:25 (See W Hall Harris III's article - [An Out-of-this-World Experience A Look at Kosmos in the Johannine Literature](#))

**Only begotten** (One of a Kind, One and Only, unique)(3439)(**monogenes** from **monos** = alone + **genos** = birth, race, kind <> from **ginomai** = to come into being, to become) means that which is the only one of its kind of class or specific relationship and thus is unique or "one and only. Most modern scholars agree that **monogenes** does not refer to the "begetting" aspect of Jesus' sonship, but rather to His uniqueness.

**Barclay** says **monogenes** means "unique and specially beloved. Obviously an only son has a unique place and a unique love in his father's heart. So this word came to express uniqueness more than anything else. It is the conviction of the New Testament that there is no one like Jesus. He alone can bring God to men and bring men to God."

**Boice** adds that "**Unique** means being without a like or equal, single in kind or excellence, matchless. It is an important word, and it is particularly important at just this point in our study since it occurs twice in the space of five verses. In Greek the word is **monogenes**; the New International Version says "One and Only"; the French say *unique*. In each case, however, the same teaching is in view...We see at once, then, that Jesus is unique because there is no one quite like Him...He is unique in his person, birth, doctrine, works, miracles, death, resurrection, and future triumphs."

Monogenēs is used of "the only child" in a family throughout antiquity, both in Greek and Jewish literature (see DNTT, 3, 1202).]

Monogenēs conveys Christ, the God-man, stands apart from all other people – fully divine and authentically physical (human, cf. Jn 1:1-18; Phil 2:6,7). Christ emerged from eternity, coming into time through His incarnation. His birth therefore was absolutely unique – the only birth free from original sin and joining deity (Christ's eternal divine nature) to a flawless, human nature.

Monogenēs is used of Christ's "unique descent" from heaven to earth declaring Him as "absolutely unique" (TDNT IV, 738).

Monogenēs "is centered in the Personal existence of the Son, and not in the Generation of the Son" (B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St John [1883] 1966, 170).

**Richard Longnecker**, "The word monogenēs, with its variants mounogeneia (an early feminine poetic form) and mounogonos (a later masculine form), occurs first in extant Greek literature in the writings of the eighth-century bc poet Hesiod. . . . Literally monogenēs means 'sole descent' or 'the only child of one's parents.' It is a stronger term than the simple monos, for it denotes that the parents have never had more than this one child.

This is one way it was used by Hesiod (Works and Days 376; Theogony 426), Plato (Critias 113d), Herodotus (History 7.221), and Antoninus Liberalis (Mythographi Graeci, ed. E. Martini, II [1896], 32.1). "The word, however, was also used by Hesiod (Works and Days 374; Theogony 448) and the writers of the Orphic Hymns (29:2; 32:1; 40:16) in the sense of 'peerless,' 'matchless,' 'unique,' 'of singular importance,' or 'the only one of its kind,' which ideas have more to do with quality than derivation or descent. The sixty-fifth century bc philosopher Parmenides spoke of Being as 'ungenerated [agenēton], imperishable, whole, unique

[monogenēs], and without end' (Frag. 8.3-4), thereby ignoring – particularly in parallel with agenēton – any idea of generation in the word as might be found etymologically in genos. "The translation 'only begotten Son,' though venerable, fails to capture adequately John's point in his use of monogenēs huios (or monogenēs theos in Jn 1:18), . . . in Johannine usage monogenēs is an adjective connoting quality, which should be translated in a manner signaling primarily uniqueness, and that huios as a christological appellative in John's gospel and Letters connotes primarily divine nature. So, to be true to John's intent, monogenēs huios is best translated into current English as 'one and only Son'" (The NIV, BORROW [The Making of a contemporary translation](#), 120-126, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

#### Related Resources:

- [The Meaning of Monogenes in the Gospel of John - 23 page paper - Don Caffese](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [One and Only, Only Begotten](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Only Begotten](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Only Begotten](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Only Begotten](#)
- [What does it mean that Jesus is God's only begotten son?](#)
- [What is the doctrine of eternal Sonship and is it biblical?](#)
- [What is the Athanasian Creed?](#)

**Believes** (4100)([pisteuo](#) - see discussion from [pistis](#); [pistos](#)) means to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. To accept as true, genuine, or real. To have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something or someone. To consider to be true. To accept the word or evidence of. **Vincent** notes that **pisteuo** "means to persuade, to cause belief, to induce one to do something by persuading, and so runs into the meaning of to obey, properly as the result of persuasion.

The respected Greek lexicon author **W E Vine** defines belief as consisting of

- (1) a firm conviction which produces full acknowledgment of God's revelation of Truth - (2Th 2:1<sup>+</sup> -"in order that they all may be judged who did not **believe** [pisteuo] the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.")
- (2) a personal surrender to the Truth (Jn 1:12<sup>+</sup> "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who **believe** [pisteuo] in His name") and
- (3) a conduct inspired by and consistent with that surrender.

#### Related Resources:

- [Why is faith without works dead?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about obedience?](#)
- [What is the relationship of faith, works, and security in salvation?](#)
- [Faith vs. belief—what is the difference?](#)
- [Can a person believe in some sense but not be saved?](#)
- [What is a leap of faith?](#)

**Shall not perish** (622)([apollumi](#) from **apo** = away from or wholly + **olethros** = state of utter ruin <> **ollumi** = to destroy) means to destroy utterly but not to cause one to cease to exist. **Apollumi** as it relates to men, is not the loss of being per se, but is more the loss of well-being. It means to ruin so that the person (or thing) ruined can no longer serve the use for which he (it) was designed. To render useless. The gospel promises everlasting life for the one who believes. The failure to possess this life will result in utter ruin and eternal uselessness (but not a cessation of existence). **Apollumi** has the basic meaning of describing that which is ruined and is no longer usable for its intended purpose.

**Robert Morey** - That **apollumi** cannot mean "nonexistence" is clear from the way it is consistently used in the New Testament (Matt. 9:17; Luke 15:4, 6, 8, 9; John 6:12, 27; 2 Cor. 4:9; etc.). Do people pass into nonexistence when they are killed by a sword (Matt. 26:52) or a snake? (1 Cor. 10:9). Do people become nonexistent when they are hungry? (Luke 15:17). Do wineskins pass into nonexistence when they are destroyed by bursting? (Matt. 9:17). Is food annihilated when it spoils? (John 6:27). In every instance where the word **apollumi** is found in the New Testament, something other than annihilation is being described. Indeed, there isn't a single instance in the New Testament where **apollumi** means annihilation in the strict meaning of the word. ([Death and the Afterlife](#) page 90)

**Eternal** (166)([aionios](#) from [aion](#)) is an adjective which means existing at all times, perpetual, pertaining to an unlimited duration of

time (Ro 1:20+ - God's power, Mt 18:8 - God's place of judgment, Ro 16:26+ - God's attribute = [eternal](#)). See additional [discussion of aionios](#) in study of eternal punishment. John associates the adjective [aionios](#) with the noun [zoe](#) in 17 verses in his gospel.

**Life** (2222)([zoe](#)) in Scripture is refers to **physical life** (Ro 8:38+, 1Co 3:22, Php 1:20+, Jas 4:14+, etc) but more often to (2) to **supernatural life** in contrast to a life subject to eternal death (as in Jn 3:36[below](#)). This quality of life speaks of fullness of life which alone belongs to God the Giver of life, is dispensed by His Spirit (Jn 6:63, Ro 8:2+, 2 Cor 3:6+, Gal 5:25+, et al) and is available to His children now (Ro 6:4+, Ep 4:18+) as well as in eternity future (Mk 10:30, Titus 1:2+ on Eternal Life). **Mounce** adds that the adjective **aionios** "typically functions in three settings: the eternity of God and the divine realm; the blessings of salvation; and everlasting conditions that have neither beginning nor end."

**Criswell** writes "There are two words used for **'life'** in the Greek N.T. Zoe, meaning **'life'** in its absolute sense, as God has given it, is used in this verse. It signifies spiritual life in John. This word is frequently used for "eternal life" with its special emphasis upon the quality of life and its endless duration through the ages to come. This life is available only through belief in God's Son. The biblical concept of "eternal life" is more than immortality, and it involves not only the soul but also the body. From creation man was made for never-ending life, not for death. The death and resurrection of Jesus provide the basis for and give the picture of the divinely appointed redemption-life (cf. Heb. 9:14). "Life" in its purest and noblest sense is inextricably joined to regeneration (cf. Titus 3:5). John uses the Greek adjective **aionion** (**"eternal"**) only in the expression "eternal life" (John 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3). As in rabbinic tradition, it has the meaning of "the life of the age to come" (cf. Da 12:2). To have eternal life means more than to live forever. The stress is more on the quality than on the quantity, though both are affirmed. Furthermore, John reveals it to be not only an eschatological and future possession but also a present reality (cf. John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 1 John 5:13). This is the life Jesus offers to the world. The other word translated **"life"** (bios, Gk.) denotes "manner of life" (1 Tim. 2:2), "period or duration of life" (Luke 8:14), or "means of livelihood" (Mark 12:44).

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#### Our Daily Bread Devotionals related to John 3:16

- [John 3:16 Looking For Love](#)
- [John 3:16 The Largest Gift Ever](#)
- [John 3:16 The Greatest](#)
- [John 3:16 Not Likely](#)
- [John 3:16 Peace On Earth](#)
- [John 3:16 The Love Of God](#)
- [John 3:16 The Measure Of Love](#)
- [John 3:16 Do You Love The World?](#)
- [John 3:16 The Star In The Window](#)
- [John 3:16 He Died For Me!](#)
- [John 3:16 Filling An Empty Heart](#)
- [John 3:16–21 Ring of Invisibility](#)

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#### Elmer Towns - The Greatest Verse in the Bible -

- For God -- the greatest being
- so -- the greatest degree
- loved -- the greatest affection
- the world, -- the greatest object of love
- that He gave -- the greatest act
- His only -- the greatest treasure
- begotten -- the greatest relationship
- Son, -- the greatest gift
- that whoever -- the greatest company
- believes -- the greatest trust
- in Him -- the greatest object of faith
- should not perish, -- the greatest deliverance
- but have -- the greatest assurance
- eternal -- the greatest promise

- life. -- the greatest blessing

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**Norman Geisler** - JOHN 3:16—Does “**only begotten Son**” indicate that Jesus Christ is a created being?

**MISINTERPRETATION:** This verse refers to Jesus as God’s “**only begotten Son.**” The Jehovah’s Witnesses tell us that Jesus is God’s only begotten son in the sense that he was directly created by the hand of God (Aid to Bible Understanding, 1971, 918). He is thus a lesser god than God the Father.

**CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION:** The words only begotten do not mean that Christ was created but rather mean “unique” or “one of a kind” (Greek: **monogenes**). Jesus was uniquely God’s son by nature—meaning that he has the very nature of God. It is significant that when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, his Jewish contemporaries understood him to be claiming deity in an unqualified sense and sought to stone him: “We have a law, and according to that law he [Jesus] ought to die, because he made himself out to be the Son of God” (John 19:7 nasb, insert added). They thought Jesus was committing blasphemy because he was claiming deity for himself. Many evangelicals believe that Christ’s sonship is an eternal sonship. Evidence for Christ’s eternal sonship is found in the fact that he is represented as already the Son of God before his human birth in Bethlehem (John 3:16–17; cf. Prov. 30:4). Hebrews 1:2 says God created the universe through his “Son”—implying that Christ was the Son of God prior to the Creation. Moreover, Christ as the Son is explicitly said to have existed “before all things” (Col. 1:17; compare with vv. 13–14). As well, Jesus, speaking as the Son of God (John 8:54–56), asserts his eternal preexistence before Abraham (v. 58). Seen in this light, Christ’s identity as the Son of God does not connote inferiority or subordination either of essence or position. (When cultists ask : A popular handbook on cultic misinterpretations).

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**GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD** - Years ago a lady who prided herself on belonging to the intelligentsia said to me, “I have no use for the Bible, Christian superstition, and religious dogma. It is enough for me to know that **God is love.**” “Well,” I said, “do you know it?” “Why, of course I do,” she said; “we all know it, and that is religion enough for me. I do not need the dogmas of the Bible.” “How did you find out that God is love?” I asked. “Why,” she said, “everybody knows it.” “Do they know it in India?” I asked. “That poor mother in her distress throwing her little baby into the Ganges to be eaten by filthy and repulsive crocodiles as a sacrifice for her sins—does she know that **God is love?**” “Oh, well, she is ignorant and superstitious,” she replied. “Those poor natives in the jungles of Africa, bowing down to gods of wood and stone, and in constant fear of their fetishes, the poor heathen in other countries—do they know that **God is love?**” “Perhaps not,” she said, “but in a civilized country we all know it.” “But how is it that we know it? Who told us that God is love? Where did we discover it?” “I don’t understand what you mean,” she said. “I’ve always known it.” “Let me tell you this,” I answered. “**No one in the world ever knew it until it was revealed from Heaven and recorded in the Word of God. It is here and nowhere else. It is not found in all the literature of the ancients.**” ([1 John 4 Commentary - Ironside's Notes](#))

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**Rod Mattoon's sermon on John 3:16**

#### **I. IT'S EXPRESSIVE IN IT'S ACTION—“For God so loved...”**

We find that the greatest lover of all lovers here in this verse. It is God. The greatest degree of love is revealed. He SO loved us. "So loved" shows His magnitude of love for us. God is the lover and the giver. Alfonso Liquori in 1750, said in the book, The Glories of Mary, "Mary so loved the world. She gave her son." This is not so! It was God who did the giving. God "so loved" (past tense) indicating He loved us before we were His children.

Romans 5:8—But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The legislative work of God is summed up in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). The redemptive work of God is summed up in the ten key words of John 3:16: God, loved, world, gave, son, believeth, Him, perish, everlasting, life.

In the December 4, 1989, issue of Newsweek magazine, there was an article about a little known mental disorder called erotomania. It is a mental illness in which a person has the delusion that he or she is the object of someone's love. Some imagine love affairs that continue for years, yet it all exists only in the imagination of the sufferer. The title of the article was "The Delusions of Love." While romantic love may have many delusions, there is no delusion about God's love. He loves you.

The Bible has much to say about the love of God. As a man who expresses his love in a letter for the woman he loves, God has expressed much about His love for us in His Word.

Bible Insights on God's Love

1. It is Universal in its offer... "He so loved the world."
2. It is Unknown in its fullness.

Ephesians 3:19—And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

3. It is Unbroken in its ministry.

Romans 8:35-39—... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [36] As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. [37] Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. [38] For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, [39] Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. It is Unending in its character.

Jeremiah 31:3—The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

5. It is Unrivaled in its example and challenge to us.

1 John 3:16—Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

## **II. IT IS EXTRAORDINARY IN ITS CHOICE—"the world."**

The greatest lover is God; the greatest degree is "so loved"; the greatest company is "the world." The world includes the unlovable and the unlovely; it also includes those whose hearts burn in love for Him and also spurn Him. God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love. In fact, there is nothing you can do to make God love you more. The world yearns to be loved, but does not realize how much the Lord loves them. Their ignorance of God and His love and care leaves them in despair.

From 1986 to 1990, Frank Reed was held hostage in a Lebanon cell. For months at a time Reed was blindfolded, living in complete darkness, or chained to a wall and kept in absolute silence. On one occasion, he was moved to another room, and, although blindfolded, he could sense others in the room. Yet it was three weeks before he dared peek out to discover he was chained next to Terry Anderson and Tom Sutherland. Although he was beaten, made ill, and tormented, Reed felt most the lack of anyone caring. He said in an interview with Time, "Nothing I did mattered to anyone. I began to realize how withering it is to exist with not a single expression of caring around [me].... I learned one overriding fact: caring is a powerful force. If no one cares, you are truly alone."

Christians, who are never truly alone, are also fortunate to receive God's gracious care through the church. This care can provide the strength to endure. John 3:16 is expressive in its sacrifice; extraordinary in its choice and expensive in its sacrifice.

## **III. IT'S EXPENSIVE IN ITS SACRIFICE—"He gave His only begotten son"**

We have seen the greatest act, "He gave," and the greatest gift, "His son." One day a young lady asked her boyfriend, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Yes dear I do." She then asked, "Would you die for me?" He replied, "No dear, mine is an undying love." Beloved, God's love was a dying love. The word "gave" is a reference to Calvary. At Calvary, God spared not His best. He gave His all, His best for us, His only begotten, His one and only son for us. Since the Lord gave us His best, don't you think we should give Him our best too instead of the leftovers of our lives? There are 25 words in John 3:16 with "son" as the central word. In the mind of God, everything centers around His son Jesus. God has no plans, programs, or purpose for the world in time or eternity that does not center around His son Jesus. This is a great reminder to us that Jesus should be at the center of our lives too.

## **IV. IT IS EXTENSIVE IN ITS OFFER—"that whosoever."**

This is the greatest opportunity.... "whosoever." His love is not just for the powerful, pretty, rich, or famous, it is for everyone, any sex, race, language, or nationality.

Romans 10:13—For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

## **V. IT IS EXCLUSIVE IN ITS BESTOWMENT—"believeth in Him"**

The greatest simplicity is mentioned here... "believeth." Eternal life does not come from working or earning salvation. The greatest attraction is also mentioned here... "in Him." God's gift is accepted by believing in Him. It is not based on wealth, strength, or might, but by believing faith.

## **VI. IT IS EXCEPTIONAL IN ITS WORK—"shall not perish"**

This is the greatest promise... "not perish." The word "perish" does not mean annihilation, but a final destiny of ruin in Hell. The word "perish" indicates God's holiness and judgment. Some ask, "How could God punish sinners in Hell?" The answer is, "He is holy."

Revelation 21:8—But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

1 Peter 1:16—Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Because the Lord is also "Love," He is not willing that anyone should perish in Hell. Men go to Hell because they choose to go there.

2 Peter 3:9—The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God's atonement is not limited. It is for the entire world. Our responsibility is to put our faith in Christ for eternal life.

1 John 2:2—And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

## **VII. IT'S ETERNAL IN ITS BLESSEDNESS—"but have everlasting life."**

Here we find the greatest certainty... "but have." The greatest possession is "everlasting life." The Gospel story begins with God and ends with everlasting life. The Gospel begins with one who had no beginning and it ends with that which has no ending (everlasting life). John expressed his gratefulness for God's gift in 1 John chapter three.

1 John 3:1—Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

John 3:16 is a powerful verse that has impacted the lives of millions across the world. In Australia, an Aborigine told a Bible translation team his feelings about John chapter three, "When we hear just any old story, we stay hot as always, but when we hear a story that affects us, it makes us cold." The love of God impacted their lives and changed them. Our response to God's love should be a deep love for Him. We have so many reasons to love Him.

1. He first loved us.

1 John 4:19—We love him, because he first loved us.

2. He hears my prayers.

Psalms 116:1—I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

3. He cares for me, preserves and rewards me.

Psalms 31:23—O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.

4. He overrules all for our good.

Romans 8:28—And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

5. He is generous with us.

1 Corinthians 2:9—But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

We owe so much to the Lord for what He did for us. Unfortunately, the world is either ignorant of what the Lord

did for us and it does not care or believe the Gospel. Let me illustrate the world's attitude with this story. John Griffith grew up with one dream in his heart—a dream of travel. He wanted to travel to faraway places and see exotic sights. Those strange-sounding names of strange-sounding lands—that's what he dreamt about and read about. That was his whole consuming passion of life, but that dream crashed with the stock market in 1929.

The Great Depression settled like a funeral cloak upon the land. Oklahoma, his native state, was turned into a swirling dust bowl by the dry winds, and his dreams were swept away with the wind. So he packed up his wife, his tiny baby boy, and their few meager belongings in an old car and drove away to find greener pastures. He thought he might have discovered those on the edge of the Mississippi, where he got a job caring for one of those great, huge railroad bridges that cross the mighty Mississippi.

It was in 1937, Dennis Hensley tells us, when this true story took place. For the first time, he brought his 8-year-old son, Greg Griffith, to work with him to see what Daddy did all day. The little boy was wide-eyed with excitement, and he clapped his hands with glee when the huge bridge went up at the beck and call of his mighty father. He watched with wonderment as the huge boats steamed down the Mississippi.

Twelve o'clock came, and his father put up the bridge. There were no trains due for a good while, and they went out a couple of hundred feet on a catwalk out over the river to an observation deck. They sat down, opened their brown bag, and began to eat their lunch. His father told him about some of the strange, faraway lands that some of these ships were going to visit. This entranced the boy.

The time whirled by, and suddenly they were drawn instantly back to reality by the shrieking of a distant train whistle. John Griffith quickly looked at his watch. He saw that it was time for the 1:07, the Memphis Express, with 400 passengers, which would be rushing across that bridge in just a couple of minutes. He knew he had just enough time, so without panic but with alacrity he told his son to stay where he was.

He leaped to his feet, jumped to the catwalk, ran back, climbed the ladder to the control room, went in, put his hand on the huge lever that controlled the bridge, looked up the river and down to see if any boats were coming, as was his custom, and then looked down to see if there were any beneath the bridge. And suddenly he saw a sight that froze his blood and caused his heart to leap into his throat. His boy! His boy had tried to follow him to the control room and had fallen into the great, huge gear box that had the monstrous gears that operated this massive bridge. His left leg was caught between the two main gears, and the father knew that as sure as the sun came up in the morning, if he pushed that lever his son would be ground in the midst of eight tons of whining, grinding steel.

His eyes filled with tears of panic. His mind whirled. What could he do? He saw a rope there in the control room. He could rush down the ladder and out the catwalk, tie off the rope, lower himself down, extricate his son, climb back up the rope, run back into the control room, and lower the bridge. No sooner had his mind done that exercise than he knew—he knew there wasn't time. He'd never make it, and there were 400 people on that train.

Suddenly he heard the whistle again, this time startlingly closer. And he could hear the clicking of the locomotive wheels on the track, and he could hear the rapid puffing of the train. What could he do? What could he do! There were 400 people, but this was... this was his son, this was his only son. He was a father! He knew what he had to do, so he buried his head in his arm and he pushed the gear forward.

The great bridge slowly lowered into place just as the express train roared across. He lifted up his tear-smudged face and looked straight into the flashing windows of that train as they flashed by one after another. He saw men reading the afternoon paper, a conductor in uniform looking at a large vest-pocket watch, ladies sipping tea out of teacups, and little children pushing long spoons into plates of ice cream. Nobody looked in the control room. Nobody looked at his tears. Nobody, nobody looked down to the great gear box.

In heart-wrenching agony, he beat against the window of the control room, and he said, "What's wrong with you people? Don't you care? I sacrificed my son for you. Don't any of you care?" Nobody looked. Nobody heard. Nobody heeded. The train disappeared across the river. Sometimes I wonder if the Lord is asking the same questions as these

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NET John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

GNT John 3:17 ο γ ρ π στειλεν θε ς τ ν υ ν ε ς τ ν κ σμον να κ ρ ν τ ν κ σμον, λ λ να σωθ κ σμος δι α το .

NLT John 3:17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

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

ESV John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

NIV John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

ASV John 3:17 For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him.

CSB John 3:17 For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

NKJ John 3:17 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

NRS John 3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

YLT John 3:17 For God did not send His Son to the world that he may judge the world, but that the world may be saved through him;

NAB John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

NJB John 3:17 For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

GWN John 3:17 God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

BBE John 3:17 God did not send his Son into the world to be judge of the world; he sent him so that the world might have salvation through him.

- **God.** Jn 5:45. 8:15, 16. 12:47, 48. Lk 9:56.
- **send** Jn 3:34. Jn 4:34. 5:36, 38. 6:29, 38, 57. 7:29. 8:42. 10:36. 11:27, 42. 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25. 20:21. Ro 8:3. 1 J 4:9, 10, 14.
- **Son.** Jn 3:35.
- **to judge.** Jn 4:42, Jn 5:22, 45. Jn 8:11, 15. Jn12:47. Lk 9:55.
- **world.** Mt 4:8.
- **but.** Jn 1:29. Jn6:40. Is 45:21-23. Isa 49:6, 7. Isa 53:10-12. Zec 9:9. Mt 1:23. Mt 18:11. Lk 2:10, 11. Lk 19:10. 1 Ti 2:5, 6. 1 Jn 2:2 1 Jn 4:14
- **world** Jn 1:10
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **GOD'S PURPOSE: SENDING HIS SON TO PARDON**

**Pardon** "is a government decision to allow a person to be relieved of some or all of the legal consequences resulting from a criminal conviction. A pardon may be granted before or after conviction for the crime, depending on the laws of the jurisdiction." How sad (and sorely deceived) that unregenerate men so often accuse God of being a Judge, not realizing that His Son's primary purpose was to pardon!

**Phillips** - The fact that Jesus Christ has come into the world provides all people with the ultimate test of believing or disbelieving, of choosing whether to continue in their sins and surely perish or whether to believe in him and pass from death to life. The coming of



Christ into this world is the watershed of eternal destiny for all. (Borrow [Exploring John page 75](#))

**For** (*gar*) is a term of explanation. God is explaining what His purpose for sending His Son was *not*. It was not to condemn but to save the world.

*Jesus came as God's Messenger with a mission  
and it was not to pronounce sentence but to provide salvation for mankind.*

**God did not send** (*apostello*) **the Son into the world** (*kosmos*) **to judge** (*krino*) **the world** (*kosmos*) - Note repetition of the **world** (*kosmos*). Jesus came not just for Jews but for the **world**. (see Hendriksen's [note](#) below) Jesus came as God's Messenger with a mission and it was not to pronounce sentence but to provide salvation for mankind. This truth shows the mercy filled heart of God, Who had every right to send His Son to judge the world which deserved condemnation. Paul writes "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (1 Ti 1:15+) Luke writes "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk 19:10+) That was the purpose for which God sent Him the first time, but in His Second Coming Jesus will come not as Savior but as Judge (Rev 19:11-16+ = "in righteousness He judges and wages war.", cf Acts 17:31+). John alludes to the future judgment by the Son when he writes "not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son." (Jn 5:22+)

So how do we explain John 9:39+ "And Jesus said, "For **judgment** (MEANS SEPARATION) I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Bultmann calls this the "paradox of revelation." As the light of the world, Jesus came that the blind might see and those who think they can see will be made blind. Those who profess a clear vision of the ways of God while at the same time denying by their lifestyle its transforming effect will ultimately find that they are blind. In other words there is a "separation," by virtue of His coming. One cannot be "neutral" toward Jesus. The fact that they saw Him (and today hear about Him) and still reject Him results in their own judicial blinding. In other words failure to receive Jesus leaves judgment as the only alternative. **Cambridge Bible** explains "Since there are sinners in the world, Christ's coming involves a separation of them from the good (BELIEVERS), a judgment, a sentence." **Morris** adds "The resolution of the paradox demands that we understand salvation as necessarily implying judgment. These are the two sides to the one coin. Jesus came to bring salvation, but the very fact of salvation for all who believe implies judgment on all who do not. This is a solemn reality, and John does not want us to escape it." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 230)

**Mounce** adds that "Jesus came "as a light, so that no one who believes in [him] should stay in darkness" (Jn 12:46). While the purpose of light is not to cast shadows, nevertheless wherever light encounters a solid object a shadow is unavoidable. Jesus did not come to "condemn" (taking *krinō*, "to judge" [GK 3212], in the sense of unfavorable judgment), but the very nature of his redemptive mission mandated a negative result for those who refused his offer. Those who do not believe bring judgment on themselves. Barrett, 217, writes that "the process of judgment is an inseparable concomitant of salvation." Some have noted an apparent contradiction between Jesus' statement here and his later remark in 9:39, "For judgment I have come into this world." Context demonstrates, however, that this latter statement points to the result rather than the purpose of his coming." (see [John](#) EBC-Revised)

**Hendriksen** - As the Jews saw it, the Messiah at his coming would condemn the heathen. The Day of Jehovah would mean punishment for the nations which had oppressed Israel, but not for Israel. This misinterpretation of prophecy had been censured most severely by Amos (Amos 5:18–20), but it never subsided. It is against this Jewish exclusivism that the words of Jesus are directed. ([A Commentary on the Gospel of John - Page 142](#))

**Mattoon** - The word "**send**" is from the Greek word *apostello* which forms our English word "apostle." It has the idea of sending forth a messenger on a definite mission. The mission of Christ was not to condemn, but to save.

**MacDonald** - God is not a harsh, cruel ruler anxious to pour out His anger on mankind. His heart is filled with tenderness toward man and He has gone to the utmost cost in order to save men.

**Jamieson** - Though "condemnation" is to many the issue of Christ's mission (Jn 3:19), it is not the object of His mission, which is purely a saving one.

**Leon Morris** - Elsewhere, however, he says that Jesus did come into the world "for judgment" (Jn 9:39). The resolution of the paradox demands that we understand salvation as necessarily implying judgment. These are the two sides to the one coin. Jesus came to bring salvation, but the very fact of salvation for all who believe implies judgment on all who do not. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Send** (649) (*apostello* from *apo* = from + *stello* = to withdraw from, avoid) means to send off, to send forth, to send out as a representative, an ambassador, an envoy, "on a commission to do something as one's personal representative, with credentials furnished" (Wuest)

**Uses of apostello by John** - Jn. 1:6; Jn. 1:19; Jn. 1:24; Jn. 3:17; Jn. 3:28; Jn. 3:34; Jn. 4:38; Jn. 5:33;

Jn. 5:36; Jn. 5:38; Jn. 6:29; Jn. 6:57; Jn. 7:29; Jn. 7:32; Jn. 8:42; Jn. 9:7; Jn. 10:36; Jn. 11:3; Jn. 11:42; Jn. 17:3; Jn. 17:8; Jn. 17:18; Jn. 17:21; Jn. 17:23; Jn. 17:25; Jn. 18:24; Jn. 20:21; 1 Jn. 4:9; 1 Jn. 4:10; 1 Jn. 4:14; Rev. 1:1; Rev. 5:6; Rev. 22:6

**Judge** (condemn)(2919)(**krino** root of English words like critic, critical [kritikos] = a decisive point at which judgment is made) primarily means divide out or separate off and in a moral sense to separate good from evil. Thus to distinguish, to decide between (in the sense of considering two or more things and reaching a decision). Krino in this context speaks of God's judging with an obviously negative verdict (condemn, punish). Note **condemn** is **katakrino** and is not used in John's Gospel.

**Krino** in the Gospel of John - Jn. 3:17; Jn. 3:18; Jn. 5:22; Jn. 5:30; Jn. 7:24; Jn. 7:51; Jn. 8:15; Jn. 8:16; Jn. 8:26; Jn. 8:50; Jn. 12:47; Jn. 12:48; Jn. 16:11; Jn. 18:31. **Krino in Revelation** - Rev. 6:10; Rev. 11:18; Rev. 16:5; Rev. 18:8; Rev. 18:20; Rev. 19:2; Rev. 19:11+ = Jesus returning to judge the world; Rev. 20:12; Rev. 20:13+ = Jesus presiding over the **Great White Throne judgment** of all unbelievers.

**But (alla)** introduces a strong contrast between **to judge** and **be saved**. In context to be judged is the opposite of to be saved.

**Ellicott** - Part of the current belief (OF THE JEWS OF JESUS' DAY) about the Messiah's advent was, that he would destroy the Gentile world. The authorised expositions of many texts of the Old Testament asserted this, and Nicodemus must oftentimes have heard it and taught it. God's love for, and gift to, the world has just been declared. This truth runs counter to their belief, and is now stated as an express denial of it. ([Commentary](#))

**Merrill Tenney** - God's purpose toward man is positive. God's attitude is not that of suspicion or hatred but of love. He is not seeking an excuse to condemn men but is rather endeavoring to save them. His purpose in sending Jesus into the world was to show his love and to draw men to himself. If they are lost, it is because they have not committed themselves to God, the only source of life. (Borrow [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**J C Ryle** - In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." (cf Jn 3:12) He shows him the main object of Messiah coming into the world. It was not to judge men, but to die for them; not to condemn, but to save....The readiness of natural man everywhere to regard Christ as a Judge much more than as a Saviour, is a curious fact. (Many) regard Christ as a kind of Judge, whose demands they will have to satisfy at the last day, much more than as a present personal Saviour and Friend. Our Lord seems to foresee this error, and to correct it in the words of this text. Calvin observes on this verse, "Whenever our sins press us,— whenever Satan would drive us to despair,—we ought to hold out this shield, that God is unwilling that we should be overwhelmed with everlasting destruction, because He has appointed His Son to be the salvation of the world."

**Morris** - Salvation was central to the mission of Jesus, a truth that is brought out also in the Synoptists (Matt. 27:42; Mark 8:35; Luke 19:10, etc.). (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**That the world might be saved through Him** - Not the the Jews might be saved, but that **the world** (Jews and Gentiles) might be saved. Of course this in no way teaches [universalism](#) as the context shows, for the next verse divides the world into those who believe and those who do not believe. (Jn 3:18) This repeats John 3:16 which shows us to **be saved** equates with "**shall not perish, but have eternal life.**" This is the only use of **save** in John 3 (only used 6x - see below). Notice the phrase **through Him** which "attributes the salvation in question ultimately to the Father." (Morris)

**Saved** (4982)(**sozo** from **sos** = safe and sound) has the basic meaning of delivering or rescuing one from great peril. Additional nuances include to protect, keep alive, preserve life, deliver, heal, be made whole. **Sozo** is sometimes used of physical deliverance from danger of perishing (see Mt 8:25; Mt 14:30; Lk 23:35; Acts 27:20, 27:31), physical healing from sickness (Mt 9:21, 22; Mk 5:23, Acts 4:9), and deliverance from demonic possession (Lk 8:36). **More often sozo refers to salvation** in a spiritual sense to rescue or preserve from eternal death, from judgment, sin, bring salvation, bring to salvation (**active sense** = Mt 18:11; Lk 7:50; Jn 12:47; Ro 11:14; 1 Cor 1:21; 7:16; Titus 3:5; Heb 7:25; Jas 4:12; 5:20; 1 Pet 3:21 or **passive sense** = be rescued or saved, attain salvation = Mt 24:13; Mk 10:26; Lk 13:23; 18:26; Jn 3:17; Jn 5:34; Acts 11:14; 15:1, 11; Ro 8:24; 11:26; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; Eph 2:5, 8; 1 Ti 2:4). Jesus' very Name speaks of His primary purpose to save men from their sin - "She (Mary) will bear a Son; and you shall call His name **Jesus**, for it is He who will **save** (sozo) His people from their sins." (Mt 1:21+) In Mt 1:21 **sozo** is equated with deliverance from sins (guilt and power of) with Jesus' Name being a transliteration of Joshua meaning "Jehovah is salvation".

**Other uses of sozo in John:**

- John 5:34 "But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be

**saved.**

- John 10:9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be **saved**, and will go in and out and find pasture.
- John 11:12 The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will **recover**."
- John 12:27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, **save** Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.
- John 12:47 "If anyone 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.

**Constable** - How can we reconcile this verse with Jn 9:39 where Jesus said that He came into the world for judgment (cf. Jn 5:27)? Judging was a secondary duty involved in saving, which was Jesus' primary purpose (cf. Dan. 7:13–14). Jesus came into an already condemned world to save some. He did not enter a neutral world to save some and to condemn others. Anyone who brings light casts a shadow, but the bringing of shadow is only an attendant circumstance that is inevitable when one brings light.

**Borchert** - Although many people think primarily of this Gospel in terms of the bright side of love, it has a dark side that is perhaps more threatening to the unbeliever than almost any other document in the New Testament except the Apocalypse. To overlook the dark side in John is to miss the full message of the Gospel. God's judging (krinetai) is a negative theme that also is foundational to this Gospel and is obvious in these verses. (NAC-Jn)

**ILLUSTRATION** - Joanne Shelter was a Bible translator for the Balangao people in the Philippines. When she came to this verse, she sought for a word for "save" in their language. She was able to find the right word by describing a court case to the people. She said, "If a law-breaker is brought before the tribal council to be judged and punished for an offense, but is released after a lawyer pleads his case, then what did the lawyer or advocate do for the accused person?" The Balangao people replied, "The advocate made the man to stand." After hearing this, Joanne translated John 3:17, "God did not send His Son to earth to sentence people to punishment, but rather to make them stand." Let me ask, "Are you standing for Christ? Are you standing in His love and grace?" (Mattoon)

"Now to **Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to MAKE YOU STAND** in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 1:24-25+)

#### Related Resource:

- [Is universalism / universal salvation biblical?](#)

**John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

NET John 3:18 The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

GNT John 3:18 πιστε ων ες α τ ν ο κρ νεται· δ μ πιστε ων δη κ κριται, τι μ πεπ στευκεν ες τ νομα το μονογενο ς υ ο το θεο .

NLT John 3:18 "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.

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

ESV John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

NIV John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

ASV John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.

CSB John 3:18 Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.

NKJ John 3:18 "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.

NRS John 3:18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

YLT John 3:18 he who is believing in him is not judged, but he who is not believing hath been judged already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

NAB John 3:18 Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

NJB John 3:18 No one who believes in him will be judged; but whoever does not believe is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son.

GWN John 3:18 Those who believe in him won't be condemned. But those who don't believe are already condemned because they don't believe in God's only Son.

BBE John 3:18 The man who has faith in him does not come up to be judged; but he who has no faith in him has been judged even now, because he has no faith in the name of the only Son of God.

- **He who.** Lk 2:34, 35.
- **believes.** Jn 5:24. 1 Jn 5:13.
- **is not judged.** Jn 3:36. Jn 5:24. Jn 6:40, 47. Jn 20:31. Ro 5:1. Ro 8:1, 34. 1 Jn 5:12.
- **he who does not believe.** Pr 1:29. Is 66:4. Mk 16:16. He 2:3. 12:25. 1 Jn 5:10.
- **has been judged** Ge 15:14. Ge 2:17. Ga 3:10. 2 Th 2:12.
- **has not.** Mt 5:18.
- **the name.** Ge 4:26. Dt 28:58. Jn 1:12.
- **only begotten.** Jn 3:16.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Sword of Damocles

## ALL NON-BELIEVERS ARE NOW UNDER JUDGMENT

All non-believers stand condemned now and will be judged by their works in Revelation 20:11-15. They are like "dead men" walking! They are like men who have the "[sword of Damocles](#)" hanging over their head at all times!

The [key word](#) in this verse is **believe** ([pisteuo](#)) which is used 3 times, this repetition by John placing great emphasis on the importance of faith.

**Morris** writes that John "has said that Christ died for people, but that does not automatically bring salvation. No one is saved without believing. John asserts this with another example of a favorite construction, the same truth being put both positively and negatively." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**He who believes** ([pisteuo](#)) **in Him is not judged** - **Believes** is in the [present tense](#) describing a continuing trust, an ongoing belief in Christ. This person has no fear of judgment for as Paul says "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Ro 8:1<sup>±</sup>).

**Pulpit Commentary** - Faith, affectionate confidence in the supreme Judge, transforms the judgment into mercy, anticipates the Divine and gracious result.

**In Him** - In Christ. John gives us a commentary on this verse quoting Jesus' promise "Truly, truly ([amen, amen](#)), I say to you, he who hears My word, and **believes** Him Who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and **does not come into judgment**, but **has passed out of death into life.**" (Jn 5:24)

**Steven Cole** on **believes** - Believing in Jesus requires understanding who He is (the unique Son of God) and what He came to do through His death and resurrection. Based on that knowledge (which we get from the Bible), believing in Jesus means to entrust your eternal destiny to all that He did in dying for your sins on the cross. It means that you cease trusting in your own goodness or good deeds as the way into heaven. Rather, you trust entirely in Jesus and His shed blood. A helpful illustration that I've used before is that of the famous tightrope walker, [Blondin](#). Perhaps you can relate to this story in light of Nik Wallenda's walking across the Grand Canyon on a cable last week. Blondin would [walk across Niagara Falls](#) on a tightrope. He did it blindfolded! He did it on

stilts! Once he carried his manager across on his shoulders. After they got safely to the other side and the applause died down, he turned to a man in the crowd and said, "Sir, do you believe that I could do that with you?" The man was about the same build as the manager who had gone across on Blondin's shoulders, so he shrugged, "Yes, I believe that you could do it." Blondin said, "Fine, hop on!" The man quickly replied, "No way!" He "**believed**" **intellectually**, but he wasn't willing to commit his life to Blondin. In the same way, many say that they believe in Jesus, but they have not committed their eternal destiny to what He did for them on the cross. Some want to try to help Him out by adding their good deeds to Jesus' shed blood. But that's like telling Blondin that you want to help him out by holding his hand as you walk behind him! It doesn't work! Faith that brings eternal life responds to God's shocking love by entrusting yourself totally to what Jesus did for you when He died on the cross. ([God's Shocking Love](#))

The object of faith is the **only begotten** (unique) **Son of God** Who Alone is "the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through (Him)" (Jn 14:6) because "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), and there is only "one Mediator...between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Ti 2:5).

[Robertson](#) - Trust in Christ prevents condemnation, for he takes our place and pays the penalty for sin for all who put their case in his hands (Rom. 8:32f.). The believer in Christ as Saviour does not come into judgment (John 5:24).

**because** - Explains why judgment has been passed.

**He who does not believe** ([pisteuo](#)) - **Does not believe** is in the [present tense](#), describing their unbelief as their continual attitude, as a persistent unbelief.

**Morris** - Unbelief has shut him or her up to condemnation. John goes on to remove all doubts as to why this should be. That person has not believed "in the name of God's one and only Son."....The coming of Jesus divides people into the saved and the condemned. This verse is of the utmost importance for our understanding of the paradox that Jesus both came to judge and did not come to judge. His coming gives people the opportunity of salvation and challenges them to a decision. To refuse his good gift is to call down judgment on oneself. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

[Pulpit Commentary](#) - Such non-belief reveals insensibility to truth, indifference to the reality of things, unsusceptibility to the light, and a moral perversity which has been persisted in. The approach to such a one of the Eternal Logos did not move him, the unveiling of the Divine face did not awe him into reverence. The sin of his life had blinded his eyes, closed his ears, hardened his heart, and the consequence was that when the Name of the only begotten Son was made known to him, like all previous Divine self-revelations, it exercised no commanding influence upon him, no convincing power, no saving grace. To refuse Christ, to manifest unbelief under such circumstances, proves that the laws of Divine judgment which are always going on have already enacted themselves.

[Expositor's Greek](#) - Not to perceive the glory of this august Being whom John so adored, not to receive the revelation made by the Only Begotten, is proof not merely of human infirmity and passion, but of wickedness chosen and preferred in presence of revealed goodness.

In his epistle John says that "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself;**the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son** (1 John 5:10)

**J C Ryle** - "Nothing is so provoking and offensive to God as to refuse the glorious salvation He has provided at so mighty a cost, by the death of His only begotten Son. Nothing is so suicidal on the part of man as to turn away from the only remedy which can heal his soul."

**Spurgeon** - "He that believeth not is condemned already." If you have heard of Christ's salvation, and you have not believed in him, that is evidence enough of your condemnation. There is no need to prove your evil works, no need to fetch your diary, and turn over the record of your life. If you have not believed in Jesus Christ, it shows a natural want of holiness, a lack of love to the loving God; and by that evidence you are condemned already, because you have not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

**Has been judged already** - **Has been judged** is [perfect tense](#) indicating that the judgment has occurred and is abiding. Every Christ rejecter stands condemned. This judgment is their reality in the "here and now" and will be consummated in the "bye and bye!" "Judgment has already been passed on the one who refuses to believe in Christ as the Saviour sent by the Father, the man who is not willing to come to Christ for life (Jn 5:40)" ([Robertson](#))

The English dictionary definition of **already** is "at a time earlier than expected!" Another dictionary says "**Already** is also used to say that a situation exists at an earlier time than expected." Unsaved individuals might be shocked (more likely they would scoff) if they really understood that judgment was hanging over their head like the [Sword of Damocles](#).

**John Phillips** illustrates their rejection and judgment - A man who has a disease that a few injections can cure, but who refuses to take the injections and consequently dies of his disease, has no one but himself to blame. He spurned the remedy. What followed in his life was the inevitable outworking of law, of cause and effect. The same is true of sinners. The judgment they reap, by rejecting Christ, they bring on themselves. Christ came to offer eternal life. They chose death. (Borrow [Exploring John page 75](#))

**Cambridge Bible** - Unbelievers have no need to be sentenced by the Messiah; their unbelief is of itself their sentence. The next verse explains how this is.

**Borchert** - Condemnation is not left to some remote future that might lull the unbeliever into a comfortable feeling that for a while one can sit on the fence of uncommitment. John makes it absolutely clear that condemnation has "already" (ēdē) taken place for the unbelievers. The idea here then is not one of a possible projected condemnation for the unbeliever but the necessity of escaping an already existing condemnation....the unbeliever, who in the present time is under condemnation (Jn 3:17), has in the future only the prospect of a resurrection to condemnation (Jn 5:29). (See [John 1-11 - Page 185](#))

**D A Carson** - Already in need of a Saviour before God's Son comes on his saving mission, this person compounds his or her guilt by not believing in the name of that Son. As with the arrogant critic who mocks a masterpiece, it is not the masterpiece that is condemned, but the critic. There is no need to await the final day of judgment (though it will come, Jn 5:26–29) (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 206)

As noted in John 5:24 believer have '**passed out of death into life.**' Non-believers are in death and under condemnation. John 3:36+ says those who do not obey (believe) the Son "**will not see life, but the wrath of God abides (present tense - continually) on him.**"

**MacArthur** - While the final sentencing of those who reject Christ is still future (cf. Jn 5:28–29), their judgment will merely consummate what has already begun. (See [John Commentary - Page 118](#))

**Because he has not believed (pisteuo) in the Name of the only begotten (monogenes) Son of God** - The cause of overhanging condemnation for every unbeliever is clearly stated. **Has not believed** is a negative in the **perfect tense** speaking of their steadfast refusal to believe, thier abiding disbelief, their "permanent attitude of refusal." ([Robertson](#)). For belief **in the Name** see John 1:12+ which describes "**those who believe in His Name.**"

**Leon Morris** links the two perfect tenses (judged....believed) writing that "The one of whom John writes has passed into a continuing state of condemnation on account of a refusal to enter a continuing state of belief." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Mounce on believed...the Name** - To trust the **name** of someone is to place one's complete reliance on everything that name stands for. The **Name** "Jesus" in Greek transliterates the Hebrew name "Joshua," which means "Yahweh is salvation." Joseph is told to name Mary's newborn son Jesus "because He will save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21+). To believe in the **Name** of Jesus is to trust Him fully for the forgiveness of sins. (See [John](#))

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**Name (3686) (onoma)** means that by which something or someone is called or known. Thus **aname** constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing. In the ancient world the **name** signified not only the person's identity but the inherent character of the person.

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This passage always reminds me of Jonathan Edwards' description of sinners in his famous sermon....

**They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell.** They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. "He that believeth not is condemned already." (John 3:18) So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell; that is his place; from thence he is, John 8:23. "Ye are from beneath," and thither he is bound; it is the place that justice, and God's word, and the sentence of his unchangeable law, assign to him.....

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than **a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.** Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to

serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies. God's creatures are good, and were made for men to serve God with, and do not willingly subserve to any other purpose, and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end. And the world would spew you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of him who hath subjected it in hope. There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you. **The sovereign pleasure of God, for the present, stays his rough wind; otherwise it would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff of the summer threshing floor.** (See [Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God](#))

**John 3:19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.**

NET John 3:19 Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

GNT John 3:19 α τη δ σπι ν κρ σις πι τ φ ς λ λυθεν ε ς τ ν κ σμον κα γ πησαν ο νθρωποι μ λλον τ σκ το ς τ φ ς ν γ ρ α τ ν πονη ρ τ ργα.

NLT John 3:19 And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

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

ESV John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

NIV John 3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

ASV John 3:19 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.

CSB John 3:19 "This, then, is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

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

NRS John 3:19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

YLT John 3:19 'And this is the judgment, that the light hath come to the world, and men did love the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil;

NAB John 3:19 And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.

NJB John 3:19 And the judgement is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil.

GWN John 3:19 This is why people are condemned: The light came into the world. Yet, people loved the dark rather than the light because their actions were evil.

BBE John 3:19 And this is the test by which men are judged: the light has come into the world and men have more love for the dark than for the light, because their acts are evil.

- **this.** Jn 1:4, 9-11 Jn 8:12. Jn 9:39-41. 15:22-25. Mt 11:20-24. Lk 10:11-16, Lk 12:47. Ro 1:32. 2 Co 2:15, 16. 2 Th 2:12. He 3:12, 13.
- **judgment** Ge 31:1 Ex 6:6.

- **world.** Mt 4:8. Jn 1:9. 12:46.
- **men loved.** Ps 11:5. 2 Sa 13:9. Isa 30:10. Jer 5:31. Ep 5:12.
- **darkness.** Jn 1:5, 6. Jn 8:12. Jn 12:35, 46. 1 Jn 1:5. 2:8, 9, 11.
- **rather than.** Jn 12:43, 48. Mt 7:26, 27. 11:20-24. 12:41. Lk 11:31, 32. Lk 12:47, 48. Ro 5:13 Ep 4:30 Heb 10:26-29.
- **for.** Jn 5:44. Jn 7:7. 8:44, 45. 10:26, 27. Jn 12:43. Ge 6:5. Ge 37:2. Is 30:9-12. Jer 17:9. Mk 7:21-23. Lk 16:14, 15. Acts 24:21-26. Ro 2:8. 1 Pe 2:8. 2 Pe 3:3.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE REASON PEOPLE REJECT CHRIST

**This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world-** As Bernard says **judgement** "is no arbitrary sentence, but the working out of a moral law." NLT = "And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world." John has just described those who obstinately do not believe ([perfect tense](#)) and now announces the verdict and describes it by using the contrast between light and darkness. The **Light that has come** is of course is Christ (Jn 1:4, 5, 9+, Jn 8:12, Jn 9:5, Jn 12:46) and His Gospel of salvation. **Has come** is in the [perfect tense](#) which speaks of the permanence or abiding effect of Jesus' coming - His [incarnation](#), [virgin birth](#), [sinless life](#), etc. **Into the world** depicts His destination coming as "**the Light of the world**" (Jn 8:12) Who "enlightens every man." (Jn 1:9+).

**Hendriksen** paraphrases John 3:18 - "Now with respect to those who reject the only-begotten Son of God, this is the divine verdict, that the Christ Who is Himself the Light—the very embodiment of the truth and love of God, yea, of all His attributes—He, by means of the word of prophecy and especially by means of His own incarnation, came into the realm of fallen mankind; but, though some accepted Him, by far the majority preferred the moral and spiritual darkness of sin (spiritual blindness, hatred of the brethren, etc., see especially 1 Jn 2:11, but also Jn 8:12; 12:35, 46; and 1 Jn 2:8, 9). In fact, they actually loved this darkness; and the reason was not that they were ignorant, having never heard the Gospel, but rather this: their works were evil." (BNTC-Jn)

**Judgment** (justice, court, sentence)([2920](#))([krisis](#) from [krino](#) = to judge, decide) means a decision or judgment, verdict, justice, court (tribunal). Mt 10:15, 11:22, 24 all describe Jesus' sobering warning to the Jews of a specific future and frightening "day of judgment." Jesus gives sinners the way of escape, the way to miss the horrible day of **judgment** (Heb 10:27)! Note the striking contrast in Jn 5:29 "those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." (Heb 9:27) In Mt 12:18 God's judgment is equated with justice, for He is the righteous and just Judge (cp Mt 12:20, 23:23, Rev 16:7).

**World** ([2889](#)) see preceding note on [kosmos](#)

**John Phillips** - This is a fine Christmas text. "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." At Bethlehem, light invaded this darkened world. A classic illustration of men loving darkness rather than light is seen in King Herod, whose deeds were evil indeed. Herod—who murdered his wife's brother, his favorite wife, and both his sons. Herod—who murdered the rank and file of the Hasmonians, whose favorite sport was to watch while several hundred of his subjects were crucified before him as he was getting drunk, who had every leading citizen in his realm arrested just days before his death and gave instructions that, immediately upon news of his own death, every one of them was to be murdered. If ever a man's deeds were evil, it was Herod's. If ever a man loved darkness rather than light, it was Herod. And when the light came into the world and he heard about it, he sent and murdered the babes of Bethlehem in an effort to overcome light with the "power of darkness." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Charles Spurgeon** - The dislike of Christ is caused by a love of sin. If men did not hug their sins, they would embrace the Saviour. You see why men do not come to Christ; they do not want to give up their sin; they do not want to be made uneasy in it; they are afraid of being reproved. You see why saintly men do come to Christ, for they take a delight in beholding him, and in having their faith and their grace made manifest, both to themselves and to onlookers....Those who love their sins cannot at the same time love the Saviour; they must love the one, and hate the other; and it is a terrible choice when they deliberately reject the only Saviour; "the Light of the world," and choose the darkness of sin, the darkness of woe, the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

**And men loved the darkness rather than the Light** - The verb **loved** is [agapao](#), the same verb John used for God loving sinful men (Jn 3:16) and the love of the Father for the Son (Jn 3:35)! Unbelievers are not ignorant, but willfully reject the Light. **Loved darkness** speaks of their active, willful rebellion (loved is [active voice](#)) against **the Light!** (cf Job 24:13) What a striking contrast -- God Who is **light** (1 Jn 1:5+) loving those who **loved the darkness!** Wesley's words are apropos "Amazing love! how can it be, That



Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!' Paul describes these darkness loving, Light rejecting individuals as those who are sons (describes one as characterized something - this case moral darkness) "of night...of darkness ([skotos](#))."<sup>1</sup> (1 Th 5:5+).

[Robertson](#) - "Darkness" is common in John as a metaphor for the state of sinners (Jn 8:12; 12:35, 46; 1 John 1:6; 1 Jn 2:8, 9, 11).

**Darkness** ([4655](#))([skotos](#) from [skia](#) = shadow thrown by an object. Skia it can assume the meaning of skotos and indicate the sphere of darkness) is literally that sphere in which light is absent. The thought is chiefly of the effect of darkness upon man. In the dark man gropes around uncertainly (Plato, *Phaedo*, 99b), since his ability to see is severely limited. John employs **skotos** only here and 1 John 1:6. His usual term is [skotia](#) (Jn 1:5; Jn 8:12; 1 John 1:5, 1 Jn. 2:8; 1 Jn. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:11), more commonly describing a state of darkness, than darkness as opposed to light. **Figuratively** as here in John 3 **skotos** refer to [spiritual darkness](#) as in the following examples

(the Gospel would) to open their eyes so that they may turn from **darkness** to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' (Acts 26:18+)

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the **darkness**, we lie and do not practice the truth (truth is not only something we should believe and teach but also something we should practice, otherwise our life is a "lie") (1 John 1:6+)

And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of **darkness**, but instead even expose them; (Ephesians 5:11+)

For He delivered us from the domain of **darkness**, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, (Colossians 1:13+)

The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of **darkness** and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12+)

**Steven Cole** - People don't want God interfering with what they consider "a good time," and they don't believe the warnings of Scripture that they are under God's judgment now and will face it eternally when they die. People think that they're basically good and that God will overlook their faults and give them credit for their good deeds on judgment day. So they don't repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ to save them from God's judgment. The Greek philosopher, Plato, observed (source unknown), "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light."

Jesus clearly teaches that the reason men do not believe in Christ is because they love their sin. John writes that in Jesus "was life, and the life was the **Light** of men. The **Light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (Jn 1:4-5+) Jesus Himself said "I am the **Light** of the world; he who follows Me **will not walk in the darkness**, but will have the Light of life." (Jn 8:12+)

**Phillips** - The reason why people hate the light is because of what it reveals. It shows us where we are and what we are. It shows us what a dark place the world is. It shows human beings how dark and evil they are. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

As **John MacArthur** says men do not believe in Christ because "They love their sin. They don't want to come near Christ 'cause He shines a light on their sin, exposes their sin. Sinners love sin. It's not ignorance. It's not lacking the basic faculties of reason. It's not misunderstanding. Sinners prefer moral darkness." ([Sermon](#))

**Steven Cole** - Picture a guy floating downstream on a raft on a hot summer day. He's having the time of his life, enjoying the ride as the cool water gently splashes on him. You're on the shore and you know that there's a deadly waterfall not far downstream. This guy is floating blissfully and ignorantly toward certain destruction! So you yell to warn him. You throw him a rope. But he rejects it and keeps floating toward certain death. Why won't he grab the life preserver? Because he loves what he's doing and he doesn't want to believe your warning.

**Leon Morris** - People choose the darkness and their condemnation lies in that very fact. They shut themselves up to darkness; they choose to live in darkness; they cut themselves off from the light. Why? "Because their deeds were evil." Immersed in wrongdoing, they have no wish to be disturbed. They refuse to be shaken out of their comfortable sinfulness. So they reject the light that comes to them and set their love (aorist tense) on darkness. Thereby they condemn themselves. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**For their deeds were evil** - **Were** (en) is in the [imperfect tense](#) which says that over and over (continuation) **their deeds were evil**. Jesus says their love of darkness is demonstrated dogmatically by their dark deeds! My mother used to say the "Proof is in the pudding!" Well, here the proof of their unregenerate darkness loving heartd is there wicked deeds..

[Robertson](#) - Jesus Himself is the only moral and spiritual light of the world (Jn 8:12) as He dared claim to His enemies. The [pathos](#)

of it all is that men fall in love with the darkness of sin and rebel against the light like denizens of the underworld, "for their works were evil." When the light appears, they scatter to their holes and dens....In the end the god of this world blinds men's eyes so that they do not see the light (2 Cor. 4:4+). The fish in the Mammoth Cave have no longer eyes, but only sockets where eyes used to be. The evil one has a powerful grip on the world (1 John 5:19+).

**Evil** (wicked, bad) (4190)(**poneros** from **ponos** = toil, **poneo** = to toil) describes actively harmful, hurtful, evil in effect or influence. Their evil is in active opposition to good (i.e., darkness lovers actively engage in evil deeds!) Given the actively nature of this evil, it should not be a surprise that this is one of the names of Satan (Mt 13:19 Mt 13:38; Ep 6:16; 1 Jn 2:13,14; 1 Jn 3:12; 1 Jn 5:18 )

**John 3:20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."**

NET John 3:20 For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed.

GNT John 3:20 π ς γ ρ φα λα πρ σσων μισε τ φ ς κα ο κ ρχεται πρ ς τ φ ς, να μ λεγχθ τ ργα α το .

NLT John 3:20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.

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

ESV John 3:20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

NIV John 3:20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

ASV John 3:20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reprov'd.

CSB John 3:20 For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.

NKJ John 3:20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

NRS John 3:20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

YLT John 3:20 for every one who is doing wicked things hateth the light, and doth not come unto the light, that his works may not be detected;

NAB John 3:20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed.

NJB John 3:20 And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, to prevent his actions from being shown up;

GWN John 3:20 People who do what is wrong hate the light and don't come to the light. They don't want their actions to be exposed.

BBE John 3:20 The light is hated by everyone whose acts are evil and he does not come to the light for fear that his acts will be seen.

- **every.** Jn 7:7. 1 Ki 22:8. Job 24:13-17. Ps 50:17. Ps 64:4. Pr 1:29. Pr 4:18. Pr 5:12. 15:12. 22:8. Am 5:10, 11. Lk 11:45. Ro 13:12. Jas 1:23-25.
- **who does evil** Jn 5:29. 1 J 3:9.
- **exposed.** Jn 16:8. Ep 5:11-13. Rev 3:19
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PRACTITIONERS

**Practitioner** is one who practices something, especially an occupation, profession, or technique. Here and in the next passage we see their practice "proves" their preference, darkness or Light. Those in this verse **loathe the Light** in contrast to those in the next verse which **love the Light!**

**For everyone who does evil hates the Light** - Does is **prasso** in the **present tense** picturing them as continually practicing these "worthless (**phaulos**) deeds." And here "practice does not make perfect!" **Hates** is also in **present tense** indicating their continuing hatred of the Light, in effect their continual hatred of Jesus Who is the Light (Jn 8:12).

**Vincent** adds this note on **evil (phaulos)** - A different word from that in the previous verse. Originally, light, paltry, trivial, and so worthless. Evil, therefore, considered on the side of worthlessness.

Jesus uses **phaulos** in the context of future judgment declaring "**Do not marvel (present imperative with a negative)** at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds (**phaulos**) to a resurrection of judgment." (Jn 5:28-29+)

**Robertson** on **hates the light** - talks against it, ridicules Christ, Christianity, churches, preachers, etc. Does it in talk, magazines, books, in a **supercilious** tone of sheer ignorance

**MacArthur** - Unbelievers hate (cf. Jn 7:7; Pr 1:29+) **the Light**, knowing it will reveal their sin (cf. Eph. 5:13+; 1 Th 5:7+). As a result, they seal their own condemnation because they reject the only One who can save them from their spiritual darkness.

**Does (4238)(prasso)** means doing something as a regular practice or as a routine habit, and is distinguished from **poieo** which means "to do" which focuses more on the end/achievement of the action. In contrast **prasso** focuses on the process or habitual effort to arrive at the end/achievement, and thus refers more to the course of conduct. (even the **present tense** of **poieo** expresses a series of repeated acts).

**Evil (5337) (phaulos)** means worthless, corrupt, good-for-nothing, depraved, mediocre, unimportant, of no account, vile, evil, wicked, foul, depraved. **Worthlessness** is the central notion (see Trench below). The word indicates the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth. **Trench explains** that "there are words in most languages, and **phaulos** is one of them, which contemplate **evil** under another aspect, not so much that either of active or passive malignity, but that rather of its **good-for-nothingness**, the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth from it... This notion of worthlessness is the central notion of **phaulos**."

**Hates (present tense)(3404)(miseo** from **misos** = hatred) means to dislike strongly, to have a strong aversion to or to detest, all of these representing expressions of hostility of one person (or group) toward another (Mt 5:43, Lk 6:27, et al). The majority of the NT uses of **miseo** convey the literal meaning of animosity towards God, people or particular attitudes. For example in John 15:18 Jesus warned His disciples "If the world **hates (miseo)** you, you know that it has **hated (miseo)** Me before it *hated* you." It is notable that **miseo** is used almost always by Jesus in the Gospels. **Miseo** in John - Jn. 3:20; Jn. 7:7; Jn. 12:25; Jn. 15:18; Jn. 15:19; Jn. 15:23; Jn. 15:24; Jn. 15:25; Jn. 17:14;

**D A Carson** - Jesus is the revelation of God and the objectification of divine holiness and purity. But men loved darkness instead of light: they preferred to live without such knowledge of God, without such brilliant purity. The reason was fundamentally moral: their deeds were evil. They were not willing to live by the truth; they valued their pride more than their integrity, their prejudice more than contrite faith. Worse, anyone in this camp hates the light and refuses to come to it for fear that his deeds will be exposed (elengchthē). The verb suggests not only exposure but shame and conviction. Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 206)

**And does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed**- As described below the verb be exposed is used of bringing something to light, in this context their evil deeds, and is primarily a function of the Holy Spirit Who produces inner conviction, and convinces the one convicted about their sin. That is the last thing these Christ rejecters want to happen. And so they make every effort not to come to the Light of the world and His Spirit!

**Robertson** on **does not come to the Light** - The light hurts his eyes, reveals his own wickedness, makes him thoroughly uncomfortable. Hence he does not read the Bible, he does not come to church, he does not pray. He goes on in deeper darkness.

**Robertson** on **exposed** - To escape this unpleasant process the evil man cuts out Christ.

**THOUGHT** - I as raised in the country and as a boy I would often go to old abandoned farms. One day I went to an old run down barn and opened the door to see if there were any hidden treasures. To my shock (and fright) what I witnessed some 60 years ago is as vivid in my mind as it was on that bright summer day. When I opened that door what seemed like hundreds of rats (it was probably more like 10-20) began to scatter to the

dark corners of that barn as the sunlight exposed them. Every time I read John 3:21, this image comes to mind and I picture unregenerate men and women running from the light as fast as they can run so that the light of Jesus and His Gospel does not expose the darkness of their hearts and their deeds.

**Be exposed** (reproved) (1651)(elegcho) means to **bring to the light** (to reveal hidden things) with the implication that there is adequate proof of wrongdoing. To expose, to convict, to reprove, to shame or disgrace and thus to **rebuke** in such a way that they are compelled to see and to admit the error of their ways. To show someone that they have done something wrong and summon them to repent. To convince by solid, compelling evidence which especially exposes what is wrong or right preeminently used of the Holy Spirit producing conviction in the heart. The Holy Spirit produces inner conviction, i.e. convinces people about what misses God's mark ("sin"). **Marvin Vincent** commenting on John 3:20 says "The different meanings unite in the word convict. Conviction is the result of examination, testing, argument. The test exposes and demonstrates the error, and refutes it, thus convincing, convicting, and rebuking the subject of it. This conviction issues in chastening, by which the error is corrected and the erring one purified. If the conviction is rejected, it carries with it condemnation and punishment. The man is thus convicted of sin, of right, and of judgment (John 16:8). In this passage the evil-doer is represented as avoiding the light which tests, that light which is the offspring of love (Apoc. 3:19), and the consequent exposure of his error. Compare Eph. 5:13; John 1:9–11. This idea of loving darkness rather than light is graphically treated in Job 24 and runs through Job 24:13–17.

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## The Light—Enemy Or Friend

Read: John 3:17-21

Everyone practicing evil hates the light . . . . But he who does the truth comes to the light. —John 3:20-21

When I was in high school, I enjoyed being on a debate team. Our object was not to establish truth but to convince the judges that our arguments were stronger than those of our opponents. So I didn't welcome the truth when someone from the other side shone its light on the issue and weakened my case.

Arguing against the light may be acceptable in debating, but it is terribly wrong in real life. Our attitude toward truth will ultimately determine our eternal destination—heaven or hell.

Many influential people today openly show their hatred for the light. For example, a recent book portrayed Jesus Christ as having had three wives. There is absolutely no evidence for such a claim, yet reviewers treated the book as if it had credibility. Either they have not read the biblical accounts of His life, or they don't want to believe that He is the sinless Son of God and the Light by whom all of us one day will be judged.

Jesus said that people who practice evil hate the light and do not come to the light, lest their deeds should be exposed (Jn. 3:20).

Lord, help us to love truth so that we will always welcome the light, even when it reveals that we are wrong.

Why should we love the darkness

That hides our sin from view?

If we would let God's light shine in,

We'd know what's good and true.

—DJD

We are not here to get used to the dark but to shine as lights.

By Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**John 3:21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."**

NET John 3:21 But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.

GNT John 3:21 ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀληθειᾶν ῥηται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, να φανερωθῇ αὐτοῦ τὰ ῥα τὰ ἐν θεῷ σὺν ἐργασίᾳ να.

NLT John 3:21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants. "

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

ESV John 3:21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

NIV John 3:21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

ASV John 3:21 But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.

CSB John 3:21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God."

NKJ John 3:21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

NRS John 3:21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

YLT John 3:21 but he who is doing the truth doth come to the light, that his works may be manifested, that in God they are having been wrought.'

NAB John 3:21 But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

NJB John 3:21 but whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God.'

GWN John 3:21 But people who do what is true come to the light so that the things they do for God may be clearly seen.

BBE John 3:21 But he whose life is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his acts have been done by the help of God.

- **he who practices** Jn 1:47. Jn 5:39. Ne 9:33. Job 13:6. Ps 1:1-3. Ps 119:80, 105. Ps 139:23, 24. Isa 8:20. Acts 17:11, 12. 1 Jn 1:6.
- **comes.** Ps 139:23, 24.
- **so that his.** Jn 9:3. \*15:4, 5. Is 26:12. Ho 14:8. 1 Co 15:10. 2 Co 1:12. Ga 5:22, 23. Gal 6:8. Ep 5:9, 13. Php 1:11. Php 2:13. Col 1:29. Heb 13:21. 1 Pe 1:22. 2 Pe 1:5-10. 1 Jn 2:27-29. 4:12, 13, 15, 16. Rev 3:1, 2, 15.
- **may be manifested** 3 Jn 11.
- **in God.** Ro 16:12. Php 2:13. 1 Jn 3:24
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE POSITIVE PRACTICE

**But - Term of contrast.** Here the contrast is between Christ rejecting darkness seekers and Christ seeking, truth doers. Note the contrast **does evil** in Jn 3:20 and **practices the truth** in this verse. Whereas the former shun the Light, the latter seek the Light.

**Carson** says that **practices the truth** (NIV = lives by the truth) is a "Semitic expression which means 'to act faithfully', 'to act honourably' (e.g. Gen. 47:29, RV; Neh 9:33). Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**He who practices the truth comes to the Light - Practices** is [present tense](#) indicating these individuals do this as their lifestyle, their habitual practice. Note that Jesus is not describing **perfection** (perfect practice of the truth), but is describing "**direction**," in this case toward the Light rather than toward the darkness! And the power to practice truth as our lifestyle is by learning to depend wholly on the [Holy Spirit of Christ](#).

In his first epistle John describes the antithesis of this passage warning that "If we say that we have fellowship with Him (GOD) and yet walk ([present tense](#) - habitually) in the darkness ([skotos](#) as in Jn 3:19), we lie ([present tense](#) - lifestyle) and do not **practice**

([present tense](#) - habitually) the truth ([aletheia](#)). (1 Jn 1:6+)

**Practices** (4160)([poieo](#)) means "to do" and focuses more on the end/achievement of the action.

**COMMENT - Marvin Vincent** adds that [poieo](#) here in Jn 3:21 "contemplates the object and end of action; the former ([prasso](#) in Jn 3:20) the means, with the idea of continuity and repetition. [Prasso](#) is the practice, while [poieo](#) may be the doing once for all. Thus ποιε ν ε ρήνην is to conclude a peace: πρόσσειν ε ρήνην, to negotiate a peace. So Demosthenes: "He will do (πρόξει) these things, and will accomplish them (ποιήσει)." In the New Testament a tendency is observable to use ποιε ν in a good sense, and πρόσσειν in an evil sense. Compare the kindred word πρ ξις, deed or work, which occurs six times, and in four out of the six of evil doing (Matt. 16:27; Luke 23:51; Acts 19:18; Rom. 8:13; 7:14; Col. 3:9). With this passage compare especially 5:29, where the two verbs are used with the two nouns as here. Also, Rom. 7:15, 19. Bengel says: "Evil is restless: it is busier than truth." In Rom. 1:32; 2:3, both verbs are used of doing evil, but still with a distinction in that πρόσσω is the more comprehensive term, designating the pursuit of evil as the aim of the activity.

**Truth** (225)([aletheia](#) from **a** = indicates following word has the opposite meaning ~ without + **lanthano** = be hidden or concealed) has the literal sense of that which contains nothing hidden, that which is not concealed, that which that is seen or expressed as it really is. The basic understanding of **aletheia** is that it is the manifestation of a hidden reality.

**So that** - [Term of purpose](#). Believers gladly seek the Light of Christ

**His deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God**- Notice the striking contrast with Christ rejecters. Light seekers desire that their deeds would be seen or **manifested**. Notice the phrase **having been wrought in God** which in simple terms means **deeds** or works which God's [Spirit](#) energizes in us and accomplishes through us (cf Php 2:14NLT+) I like [Robertson's](#) comment that this individual "does not claim that they (THEIR DEEDS) are perfect, only that they have been **wrought** in the sphere of and in the power of God. Hence he wants the light turned on."

**Vincent on wrought in God** - The element of holy action. Notice the [perfect tense](#), have been wrought (as Rev.) and abide.

**THOUGHT: Wrought in God** reminds me of Jesus' instruction regarding ["good works"](#) in John 15 where He declares "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** ([present tense](#)) **in Me** and **I in him** he bears much fruit, [AKA, **DEEDS...WROUGHT IN GOD!**], for apart from Me you can do (ABSOLUTELY) nothing (OF ETERNAL VALUE)." (Jn 15:5) In Jn 15:16 speaks about our "good works" declaring to the disciples "I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would **remain** (LASTING FRUIT! FRUIT FOR ETERNITY!)." May our Father enable us by His Spirit to **manifest good works**, works **wrought in Him**, for His glory and the renown of the Lamb of God. Amen

**John MacArthur** comments that "Believers hate their sin and love righteousness (1 John 2:3–6, 9; 3:6–10). They have nothing to hide, and thus no reason to fear what the light will reveal." (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

Jesus used this same verb **wrought** or [ergazomai](#) later in John commanding **"Do not work** ([ergazomai](#) in [present imperative with a negative](#) which necessitates our dependence [the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." (Jn 6:27) And later He said "We must **work** ([ergazomai](#)) the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can **work** ([ergazomai](#)). (Jn. 9:4)

We see this same idea in Paul's description of believers writing "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. " (Eph 2:10<sub>+</sub>)

True believers will "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." (Mt 3:8+)

Good deeds in fact testify that one is a genuine disciple Jesus declaring "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (Jn 15:8) And continuing the contrast with the evil deeds of the unregenerate in John 3:20 Jesus warned that "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Mt. 7:19<sub>+</sub>).

**May be manifest** (disclosed, revealed) (5319)([phaneroo](#) from [phanerós](#) = manifest, visible, conspicuous in turn from [phaino](#) = give light; become visible in turn from [phos](#) = light) is literally "to bring to light" and primarily means "to make visible" or to cause to become visible. The basic meaning of **phaneroo** is to make known, to clearly reveal, to manifest, to cause to be seen or to make something clear. To be manifested is more than to "appear." A person may "appear" in a false guise or without a disclosure of what he truly is; **to be manifested** is to be revealed in one's true character; this is especially the meaning of **phaneroo**, see,

e.g., John 3:21; 1Co 4:5; 2Cor. 5:10, 11; Ep 5:13.

**Wrought** ([perfect tense](#)) ([2038](#)) ([ergazomai](#) from **ergon** = work) means to engage in an activity involving considerable expenditure of effort. To work effectively. **Ergazomai** is often used to describe work in a spiritual sense, implying supernatural work, work that God does, work that God (His Spirit indwelling believers) energizes in and through His children, work that lasts for all eternity! (Jn 5:17, Jn 6:27, Jn 9:4)

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## Good and Evil and Light John 3:21 - John Butler

The righteous act differently than the wicked. If your conduct is like the conduct of the world, your salvation is suspect.

### FIRST—THE CONTRAST IN THEIR COMPARISON

"But." The previous verse spoke of the conduct of the wicked, "But" says there is a great contrast in conduct to the wicked. One wonders sometimes if the contrast exists, as it seems everybody is acting unholy and no one seems to be acting holy. This not only is true in society but it also seems to be true at church.

### SECOND—THE CONDUCT IN THE COMPARISON

"Doeth truth." The ungodly are said to do evil and to hate the light. But the righteous are described as those who "doeth truth." This phrase "doeth truth" is another term for holiness. Jesus Christ is the personification of truth, for He said, "I am the truth" (John 14:6). Those who do truth do not despise the light, but evil "hateth." the light (truth). You will never see the hates laws of today attack the hatred of truth. The hate laws are only to attack those who "doeth truth."

### THIRD—THE CROWD IN THE COMPARISON

"He." This is a contrast to the wicked crowd. The verse prior to this one describes the wicked as "everyone," but our text describes the righteous as "he." Matthew 7:13, 14 describes people in the same way. The righteous are "few" but the wicked are "many." However, the fact that wickedness is more popular than righteousness does not validate wickedness, it only says that more people will be condemned to hell than those who make it through the pearly gates to heaven. If you live a godly life, do not be surprised if you walk alone.

### FOURTH—THE COMPASSION IN THE COMPARISON

"Cometh to the light." The godly are interested in truth and righteousness. The wicked are not. That accounts for why sports' stadiums and arenas have capacity crowds on Sunday while church services have mostly empty pews. The ungodly are not interested in spiritual things and so do not come to the Light. This is seen symbolically in the fact that the wicked have their bars and pubs dark. No bar or pub has much of an electric bill. Evil loves darkness. Truth loves the light. It is therefore interested in Jesus Christ and His Word.

### FIFTH—THE CONFIRMATION IN THE COMPARISON

"That his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." The doer of truth is not afraid of the "light" he knows the light will vindicate him. It will verify his righteousness. Those who are righteous know they have nothing to hide and are not only not afraid of the light but invite the light to inspect them. In contrast evil does not come to the light, "lest their deeds should be reproved" (John 3:20). Therefore they do not come to Christ nor do they read and study His Word. Disinterest in the Word may confirm you as unsaved. (Sermon Starters)

**John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.**

NET John 3:22 After this, Jesus and his disciples came into Judean territory, and there he spent time with them and was baptizing.

GNT John 3:22 Μετ τα τα λθεν ησο ς κα ο μαθητα α το ε ς τ ν ουδα αν γ ν κα κε δι τριβεν μετ α τ ν κα β ππιζεν.

NLT John 3:22 Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

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

ESV John 3:22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

NIV John 3:22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.

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

CSB John 3:22 After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized.

NKJ John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

NRS John 3:22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized.

YLT John 3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples to the land of Judea, and there he did tarry with them, and was baptizing;

NAB John 3:22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, where he spent some time with them baptizing.

NJB John 3:22 After this, Jesus went with his disciples into the Judaeian countryside and stayed with them there and baptised.

GWN John 3:22 Later, Jesus and his disciples went to the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them and baptized people.

BBE John 3:22 After these things Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judaea, and there he was with them for some time, giving baptism.

- **these.** Jn 2:13. 4:3. 7:3.
- **disciples.** Jn 2:2.
- **and baptizing.** Jn 3:26. Jn 4:1, 2.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PARALLEL MINISTRIES OF JESUS AND JOHN IN JUDEA

Both were doing the same thing but there was no rivalry.

[Constable](#) - John the Baptist readily confessed Jesus' superiority to him even though they were both doing the same things. This was further testimony to Jesus' identity. This section constitutes the very core of the Apostle John's testimony to Jesus' identity in Jesus' early ministry (chs. 2-4).

**BKC** - For a short time the ministry of John the Baptist overlapped Jesus' ministry. Thus the Judean countryside must have been alive with the teaching of both these great preachers of repentance and God's kingdom.

[Guzik](#) - John continues his account of the life of Jesus with the emphasis on what He did in Judea. The other Gospels focus on the work of Jesus in the Galilee region. (Enduring Word Bible Commentary – John)

**J C Ryle** - ON one account, this passage deserves the special attention of all devout readers of the Bible. It contains the last testimony of John the Baptist concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. That faithful man of God was the same at the end of his ministry that he was at the beginning—the same in his views of self,—the same in his views of Christ. Happy is that church whose ministers are as steady, bold, and constant to one thing, as John the Baptist!

**John Phillips** - The closing verses of this chapter (Jn 3:22-36) are a sequel to the Lord's visit to Jerusalem. He had come to the holy city and had offered himself as [Messiah](#) by spectacularly cleansing the Temple (Jn 2:13-25+). That dramatic sign was either ignored or misinterpreted. He thereupon left the city and retired to the more rural parts of Judea. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**After these things** (meta tauta) - John uses this time phrase frequently (Jn 2:12; 3:22; 5:1, 14; 6:1; 7:1; 11:19–28, 38) but usually without an indication of the length of time between the previous and present event. So what **things** does this present event follow? This is not completely clear but probably refers to the the cleansing of the Temple, the miracles and finally the nighttime discussion with Nicodemus (John 2:21-3:21) [Robertson](#) says "after the interview with Nicodemus." **Kostenberger** comments that **after these thing** "likely is meant to suggest that these events occurred at an unspecified time interval after Jesus' Jerusalem ministry."



(BECNT-Jn) **Godet** says **after these things** "connects this passage, in a general way, with John 2:23–25+ "Following upon this activity of Jesus at Jerusalem.'" (Commentary on the Gospel of John) **Lenski** says "The plural pronoun in the phrase **μετ τα τα** includes all that Jesus had done in Jerusalem (Jn 2:12–3:21) although John has given only a slight hint in Jn 2:23+ as to what this included. Jesus now moves from the capital "into the Judean country." (Borrow [The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel](#))

**Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea**- Recall that Jesus previous discussion with Nicodemus took place in Jerusalem (Jn 2:23+) which is of course in the territory of **Judea**. Therefore John is describing Jesus moving from the city to the countryside, where baptizing could be performed.

**Constable** - Jesus had not yet commissioned the Twelve. That commissioning happened after John the Baptist's imprisonment (Mark 1:14). The disciples who accompanied Jesus may not have been the Twelve, but they were His followers and they could have included all or some of the Twelve. This is the only record in the Gospels that Jesus engaged in a baptizing ministry similar to John the Baptist's. (Ibid)

**And there He was spending time with them and baptizing** - **Spending time** means literally to be rubbing away prompting Brian Bell to suggest that "The idea is of rubbing shoulders w/others long enough to get into their (HIS DISCIPLES) lives....One of Jesus' top priorities was discipling 12 men. This required time, and He took the time."

This verse explains at least in part Jesus' purpose for leaving the city and presumably was near the Jordan River as water would be necessary for baptizing. As we learn in John 4:2+ "Jesus Himself was not **baptizing**, but His disciples were." Godet comments "The moral act belonged to Jesus; the material operation was wrought by the disciples. If these two passages were found in two different Gospels, criticism would not fail immediately to see in them a contradiction, and would accuse of harmonistic bias the one who should seek to explain it. The intention of the narrator in our passage is only to place this baptism under the responsibility of Jesus Himself." Notice the phrase **and baptizing** which suggests that Jesus was teaching and preaching and those who repented were being baptized.

**J C Ryle** on **spending time** - The Greek word so rendered signifies a lengthened stay.

**Morris** says this baptism "probably it represents a continuation of the 'baptism of repentance' that was characteristic of John the Baptist." This would seem reasonable since Jesus began preaching (Mt 4:17) just as John had been preaching (Mt 3:2). (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Henry Alford** agrees that "The baptism now carried on by the disciples [of Jesus] appears to have stood very much in the same position as that of John."

**Gilbrant** comments that "The scene was the Jordan River. The Jordan was a natural memorial of God's past work in behalf of Israel when Joshua led the nation into the new land. Jesus began His ministry at this memorial that brought an end to the old life and initiated a new order. (The Complete Biblical Library – John)

**Craig Evans** - Just as Nicodemus must be born "from above" (Jn 3:3), so now John the Baptist becomes a witness to Jesus as one who is "from above" (Jn 3:31) Jesus has descended from heaven (3:12–13) bringing heavenly gifts of Spirit and rebirth—he is a messenger who reveals what he has seen and heard in heaven's precincts (3:31–32). Just as Nicodemus represents Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, so now, John the Baptist is a Jewish prophet. Both men are from "the earth" while Jesus is "from above." Acts 19:1–7 mentions followers of John the Baptist living in Ephesus who did not believe in Jesus. Later post-apostolic evidence even suggests that such communities continued to exist a few generations later. They were communities which elevated John the Baptist and rejected Jesus' messiahship. If such a polemic existed in the communities that would read the Fourth Gospel, John 3:22–36 becomes a potent corrective. John the Baptist becomes a premier witness to Jesus dispelling rumors of a rivalry with Jesus and urging his followers to believe in him. The Baptist devalues his own status—as the friend (3:29) compared with the bridegroom—and says explicitly that "he must become greater; I must become less" (3:30). This is our only record that Jesus had a baptizing ministry. But we must remain clear that at this point Jesus is conducting a baptism of repentance, no doubt like that of John since, as 7:37–39 says, the Spirit (a feature of Christian baptism) was not yet. However the gospel makes clear that Jesus' disciples, not Jesus himself, baptized people (4:2). Imagine the sort of elitism that could have developed in the ancient church between those baptized by Jesus and those baptized by anyone else.(The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary)

**Spending time** "implies that a considerable period of time elapsed (cf. its use in Acts 12:19; 14:3, 28; 15:35; 25:14) probably several months." (MacArthur) **Baptizing** is [imperfect tense](#) which would depict them **baptizing** one after another.

**Spending time** (1304)(**diatribo** from **dia** = through or intensifier + **tribo** = to wear, to spend; English **diatribe** = an abusive speech) literally means to rub away, to rub through, to wear away, to consume by rubbing. In the NT spoken only of TIME meaning to spend or pass time in a place, to stay, remain, tarry (Jn 3:22 = Jesus "was spending time with" His disciples, Acts 15:35 = "Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch"). Two uses in the

Septuagint - Lev. 14:8; Jer. 35:7. All 9 NTY uses - Jn. 3:22; Acts 12:19; Acts 14:3; Acts 14:28; Acts 15:35; Acts 16:12; Acts 20:6; Acts 25:6; Acts 25:14

**Baptizing** (907)(**baptizo** from **bapto** = cover wholly with a fluid; stain or dip as with dye; used of the smith tempering the red-hot steel, used of dyeing the hair; of a ship that "dipped" = sank) has a literal and a figurative meaning in the NT. The literal meaning is to submerge, to dip or immerse as in water. A study of the 77 NT uses (See below) reveals that most of the uses of **baptizo** in the Gospels and Acts are associated with literal water baptism. The Greeks used **baptizo** to describe the dyeing of a garment, in which the whole material was plunged in and taken out from the element used. **Baptizo** was used of the act of sinking ships. **Baptizo** also meant to bathe of a boat which had been wrecked by being submerged and then stranded on the shore. Figuratively, **baptizo** pictures the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition. In this sense **baptizo** means to be identified with.

The **baptism of John the Baptist** was for repentance and was associated with a genuine belief in Jesus (Acts 19:4+) and thus these Jews who were being baptized by John (eg, Mt 3:6+, Mk 1:4, 5+, Contrast Lk 7:29+ = saved with Lk 7:30+ = unsaved) were genuinely "saved". Note that it was not the fact that John baptized them in water that they were saved but their salvation was based on repentance and belief in Jesus. See [What was the meaning and importance of the baptism of John the Baptist?](#)

**James Montgomery Boice** helps understand this figurative meaning of **baptizo** writing that "The clearest example that shows the meaning of **baptizo** is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be '**dipped**' (**bapto**) into boiling water and then '**baptised**' (**baptizo**) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of **baptizing** the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When used in the New Testament, this word more often refers to **our union** and **identification** with Christ than to our water baptism... mere intellectual assent is not enough. **There must be a union with Him, a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle**" (Bolding added)

**John 3:23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized--**

NET John 3:23 John was also baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming to him and being baptized.

GNT John 3:23 ὁ δὲ καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐρημῷ βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνὼν ἕγγιστον Σαλῆμ, ὅτι ὕδατα πολλὰ ἐκεῖ, καὶ παρεγίνοντο καὶ βαπτίζοντο.

NLT John 3:23 At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism.

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

ESV John 3:23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized

NIV John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.

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

CSB John 3:23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized,

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

NRS John 3:23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people

kept coming and were being baptized

YLT John 3:23 and John was also baptizing in Aenon, nigh to Salem, because there were many waters there, and they were coming and were being baptized --

NAB John 3:23 John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was an abundance of water there, and people came to be baptized,

NJB John 3:23 John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, where there was plenty of water, and people were going there and were being baptised.

GWN John 3:23 John was baptizing in Aenon, near Salim. Water was plentiful there. (People came to John to be baptized,

BBE John 3:23 Now John was then giving baptism at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were given baptism.

- **was baptizing.** Mt 3:5, 6. Mk 1:4, 5.
- **Aenon.** i.e. fountains, springs; to praise; cloud, darkness, only here. Ezek 47:17. 48:1
- **near Salim.** only here. Ge 14:18. Ge 33:18, Shalem. 1 Sa 9:4
- **much water.** lit. "many springs." much refers to number of springs. Ex 15:27. Nu 24:7. 2 Sa 22:17, 18. 2 Chr 32:3, 4. Ps 18:16. 77:19. 93:4. 107:23. Isa 17:13. Jer 9:1. Jer 51:13, 36. La 2:11, 18, 19. La 3:48, 49. Ezek 1:24. Ezek 19:10. 43:2. Rev 1:15. Rev 14:2. 17:1. Rev 19:6.
- **people were coming** Mt 3:5, 6. Mk 1:4, 5. Lk 3:7.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### POSSIBLE LOCATION OF AENON

**John also was baptizing in Aenon** ("abounding in springs" or "double spring") **near Salim - Was baptizing** is [imperfect tense](#) which would depict them **baptizing** one after another. One can picture them descending into the water one after another. The location is uncertain. **Aenon** is a transliterated Semitic word meaning 'springs'. **MacArthur** - The exact location of this reference is disputed. It could refer to either Salim near [Shechem](#) or Salim that is six miles south of [Beth Shean](#). Both are in the region of [Samaria](#). **Aenon** is a name that means "springs," and both of these possible sites have plenty of water ("much water there")." (One Perfect Life)

**NET Note** on **Aenon** - The precise locations of Aenon and Saleim are unknown. Three possibilities are suggested: (1) In Perea, which is in Transjordan (cf. 1:28). Perea is just across the river from Judea. (2) In the northern Jordan Valley, on the west bank some 8 miles [13 km] south of Scythopolis. But with the Jordan River so close, the reference to abundant water (3:23) seems superfluous. (3) Thus Samaria has been suggested. 4 miles (6.6 km) east of Shechem is a town called Salim, and 8 miles (13 km) northeast of Salim lies modern Ainun. In the general vicinity are many springs. Because of the meanings of the names (Ainun, n = "springs" in Aramaic and Saleim = Salem, "peace") some have attempted to allegorize here that John the Baptist is near salvation. Obviously there is no need for this. It is far more probable that the author has in mind real places, even if their locations cannot be determined with certainty.

**F F Bruce** - "The name **Aenon** (Ainun means 'springs', which would provide the 'much water' (literally 'many waters') required by John for baptizing."

#### Related Resources:

- American Tract Society [Aenon](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Aenon](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Aenon](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Aenon](#)
- Hitchcock Bible Names [Aenon](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Aenon](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Aenon](#)
- Morrish Bible Dictionary [Aenon](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Aenon](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Aenon](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Aenon](#)

**Because there was much water there** - Literally "because there were many waters there." For baptizing, not drinking. Phillips writes "crowds who still flocked to John's meetings: rabbis and rulers from Jerusalem, publicans and peasants, ordinary folk, even Roman soldiers. A perennial stream and abundant springs provide plenty of water." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**And people were coming and were being baptized** - Both verbs are in the [imperfect tense](#) "one middle and the other passive, graphically picturing the long procession of pilgrims who came to John confessing their sins and receiving baptism at his hands." ([Robertson](#)) The vivid tenses picture Jews coming one after another and being baptized one after another. As **Carson** says "Despite the onset of Jesus' ministry, people were constantly coming to be baptised by John the Baptist." Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

### John 3:24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

NET John 3:24 (For John had not yet been thrown into prison.)

GNT John 3:24 ο πω γ ρ ν βεβλημ νος ε ς τ ν φυλακ ν ω ννης.

NLT John 3:24 (This was before John was thrown into prison.)

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

ESV John 3:24 (for John had not yet been put in prison).

NIV John 3:24 (This was before John was put in prison.)

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

CSB John 3:24 since John had not yet been thrown into prison.

NKJ John 3:24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

NRS John 3:24 -- John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.

YLT John 3:24 for John was not yet cast into the prison --

NAB John 3:24 for John had not yet been imprisoned.

NJB John 3:24 For John had not yet been put in prison.

GWN John 3:24 since John had not yet been put in prison.)

BBE John 3:24 For at this time John had not been put into prison.

- **For.** Jn 1:24.
- **John.** Jn 5:35. Mt 4:12. Mt 14:3. Mk 6:17. Lk 3:19, 20. 9:7-9.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**For John had not yet been thrown (ballo - cast) into prison** - Until John the Baptist was **thrown into prison** by Herod, his ministry overlapped that of the Lord Jesus. As explained below, John's imprisonment is a turning point in Jesus' ministry. After John's imprisonment He moves out of Judea and into Galilee to begin his Galilean Ministry. All of the preceding events from John 1:19 describe events in Jesus' Judean Ministry, a ministry which last from 12-14 months and which is not recorded at all in the three Synoptic Gospels.

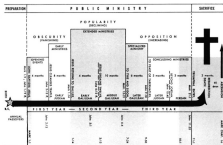
**Prison (5438)**([phulake](#) from [phulasso](#) = to guard, watch) means a guarding (the act of guarding or keeping watch - Lk 2:8, Nu 1:53, 3:7, 28) or guard (the person doing the watching - Acts 12:10) , a prison as a place where someone is guarded (Mt 5:25, 14:3, 10, 18:30, 25:36, 39, 43, etc). **Phulake** is used of a holding cell pending trial

**MacArthur explains why John inserts this verse in his account** - The statement informs readers that this incident took place between Jesus' temptation (Mt 4:1ff+, Lk 4:1ff) and John's imprisonment, a period of time about which the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are silent. The Synoptics begin their account of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee after John is already in prison (Matt. 4:12+; Mark 1:14). The Gospel of John supplements them by recording these earlier events from Jesus' ministry (ED: SEE UNSHADED AREA TO LEFT SIDE OF CHART BELOW), events that were simultaneous with John the Baptist's ministry in Samaria. The apostle John clarifies the timing here so that his readers will not be confused. (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

If you are still somewhat confused (as I was), below is a chart to help visualize the record of Jesus' ministry in Judea which is not found in the Synoptic Gospels. There are a couple of points you need to notice. Notice that Mt 4:12+, Mk 1:14+ and Lk 4:14+ each mark the beginning of Jesus' **Galilean Ministry**, but only Matthew and Mark specifically associate this beginning with John the Baptist's imprisonment. Luke 4:14+ does not say anything about the imprisonment. Luke (and here is where one could be easily confused) actually describes the imprisonment of John the Baptist in Luke 3:19-20+, which is **BEFORE** his description of Jesus' Baptism and Temptation in the chart below. Here is what you need to understand -- **Luke is not giving a chronological description. William Hendriksen** agrees that "As is so often the case, **Luke's account here is not chronological...**But though not always chronological, Luke's account is logical. He wishes to bring the story of John's ministry to a close, in order to write the story of Christ's ministry. There surely can be no objection to that." (BNTC-Luke)

<b>Baptism</b>	<b>Mt 3:13-17+</b>	<b>Mk 1:9-11+</b>	<b>Lk 3:21-22+</b>
<b>Temptation</b>	<b>Mt 4:1-11+</b>	<b>Mk 1:12-13+</b>	<b>Lk 4:1-13+</b>
<b>Jesus Early Judean Ministry Year of Obscurity TIME GAP</b>	<b>Only described in John 1:19-4:54 No Record in Synoptic Gospels</b>		
<b>Jesus Begins Ministry in Galilee</b>	<b>Mt 4:12+</b>	<b>Mk 1:14+</b>	<b>Lk 4:14+</b>

From the chart note that the **TIME GAP** occurs only in the Gospel of John between Mk 1:13 and Mk 1:14, Mt 4:11 and Mt 4:12 and Luke 4:13 and Luke 4:14. This **TIME GAP** is estimated to be about 12-14 months and constitutes Jesus' **EARLY JUDEAN MINISTRY** completely omitted by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Some refer to this **TIME GAP** as the "**YEAR OF OBSCURITY.**" (See study by S Lewis Johnson - [The Messiah's Year of Obscurity](#)) Jesus may have been "obscure" but He was not inactive - John records Jesus' early interaction with John the Baptist (John 1), the miracle of Water to Wine at a wedding (John 2), the Temple cleansing (John 2) and giving Nicodemus knowledge by night (John 3)! This period unique to the Gospel of John extends from about John 1:19+ through John 4:44, 45+. It is also known as the **EARLY JUDEAN MINISTRY** because most of the events occurred in Judea. Note however that some of the events in John 1:19-4:54 took place in Samaria and even Galilee, but Jesus official ministry in Galilee did not begin until after John was taken into prison. Below is another diagram from Dr Irving Jensen to help you visualize this somewhat confusing chronology. Click the chart and you will be able to readily distinguish the **SHADED** areas referring to Jesus' Ministry in the Gospel of Mark (charts of Matthew and Luke while not identical are similar). Note the left side of the diagram is **UNSHADED** and is a depiction of the **TIME GAP** or **YEAR OF OBSCURITY** of Jesus' ministry lasting about 12-14 months and described only in the Gospel of John.



Click to Enlarge

**John Phillips** gives an interesting breakdown of the book of John by **geographic location** and **by years** (keeping in mind that the years are approximations)...

- A.D. 27 The Calm Year Judea (John 1:1-42)
- Galilee (John 1:43-2:12)
- Judea (John 2:13-3:36)
- Samaria (John 4:1-42)
- Galilee (John 4:43-54)
- A.D. 28-29 The Crowded Year Judea (John 5:1-47)
- Galilee (John 6:1-7:9)
- Judea (John 7:10-10:21)
- Galilee (between John 10:21-22)
- Judea (John 10:22-39)
- Perea (John 10:40-11:16)
- A.D. 30 The Closing Year Judea (John 11:17-20:31)
- Galilee (John 21:1-25)

A general survey of these periods shows that the first period was comparatively quiet and lasted a year, the Lord alternating his ministry between Judea and Galilee. When Herod Antipas put John the baptist in prison (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19-20;

John 4:1-4), the Lord departed to Galilee where he presented himself not as a king but as a prophet. His ministry was designed to draw public attention to himself. The first five chapters of the gospel of John all have to do with this year of comparative calm and tranquility. Apart from these chapters we would know little about the year between the Lord's baptism and the imprisonment of John the baptist. The **silencing of John the baptist** was the Lord's signal to begin preaching, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," reiterating the message of the baptist (Matthew 4:12-17). Although the next two years were crowded years, John's gospel practically ignores them. Chapter 6 is the only place where John mentions this period. **The next watershed** came when at Caesarea Philippi Simon Peter made his messianic confession (6:68-69) and the Lord began to disclose to his disciples that he was going to be crucified (Matthew 16:13-20). The last six months of the Lord's life were darkened by the shadow of the cross. Much of this busy time was spent in Perea. In John's gospel, chapters 7-21 have to do with events after Caesarea Philippi. These general movements in the Lord's life are sketched only in a general way but they help us get the feel of what was going on. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

### John 3:25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification.

NET John 3:25 Now a dispute came about between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew concerning ceremonial washing.

GNT John 3:25 γ νετο ο ν ζ τησις κ τ ν μαθητ ν ω ννου μετ ουδα ου περ καθαρισμο .

NLT John 3:25 A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing.

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

ESV John 3:25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

NIV John 3:25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.

ASV John 3:25 There arose therefore a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying.

CSB John 3:25 Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification.

NKJ John 3:25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.

NRS John 3:25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew.

YLT John 3:25 there arose then a question from the disciples of John with some Jews about purifying,

NAB John 3:25 Now a dispute arose between the disciples of John and a Jew about ceremonial washings.

NJB John 3:25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew about purification,

GWN John 3:25 Some of John's disciples had an argument with a Jew about purification ceremonies.

BBE John 3:25 Then a question came up between John's disciples and a Jew about washing.

- **disciples.** Jn 1:35
- **about purification** Jn 2:6. Nu 19:7. Mt 3:11. Mk 7:2-5, 8. Lk 11:38. Heb 6:2, Heb 9:8-10, 13, 14, 23. 1 Peter 3:21
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Therefore** - By extension, here's how the dots connect. **Therefore** introduces the necessary conclusion (inference) to complete the "cause-and-effect" relationship with what precedes. Doing this shows the "seamless unity" of premise and extension that exists between sentences and paragraphs. In this case John had just describe baptizing in John 3:22, 23, so this led the disciples of John to discuss baptism, the two ministries baptizing concurrently and was probably about the benefits of John's baptism against those of Jesus' baptism.

**There arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification-** **Discussion** is probably a bit "soft" for the Greek word signifies more of a dispute, an argument, a debate, a quarrel or a controversy rather than a simple discussion. In other words the Greek word usually describes a forceful expression of differences of opinion without necessarily having a presumed goal of seeking a solution and thus implies a conflict as opposed to a **discussion**. As **Godet** says "The occasion of the following discourse was a discussion provoked by the competition of the two neighboring baptisms." The Greek word for **on the part of** is the preposition "[ek](#)" which indicates the source of the activity as coming out of John's disciples. Stated another way John's disciples were the instigators. The **Jew** is not specified as a follower of Jesus or John. The phrase **about purification** does not refer to

**purification** is general, that is the old Jewish rules and rituals but centers on the issue of baptism (Jesus and John's baptisms). The specific issue that is under dispute is left unstated. **Lenski** proposes that "All we can gather from the complaint of the Baptist's disciples in v. 26 is that the Jew maintained the superiority of Jesus' Baptism over that of the Baptist, which the disciples of the latter refused to admit as it would also involve that men should leave the Baptist and go to Jesus." (Borrow [The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel](#))

**J R Michaels** observes that "At this point we learn that John still had **disciples** of his own (as in Mk 2:18; 6:29; Lk 5:33; 11:1; Mt 11:2), even though at least two of them had gone off to follow Jesus (Jn 1:35–40+)." (Gospel of John).

**Robertson** writes that "The committee from the Sanhedrin had challenged John's right to baptize (John 1:25). The Jews had various kinds of baptisms or dippings (Hebrews 6:2+), "baptisms of cups and pots and brazen vessels" (Mark 7:4+). The disciples of John came to him with the dispute (the first known baptismal controversy, on the meaning of the ceremony) and with a complaint."

**Discussion** (2214) (**zetesis** from **zeteo** = to seek) is a word used by the Greeks to indicate philosophical inquiry. The most common meaning of **zetesis** refers to the exchange of words for the purpose of disputing, engaging in contentious, controversial questions. **Zetesis** denotes the preoccupation with pseudo-intellectual theorizing. It pictures one engaging in debates rather than the carrying out of a genuine search for information.

**Disciples** (3101) (**mathetes** from **math-** "mental effort that thinks something through") is a learner; a follower who learns the doctrines and the lifestyle of the one they follow. Luke alludes to some disciples of John even after the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 19:1, 2-5+). Apollos for example seems to have been a follower of John the Baptist (cf Acts 18:24-26+). Discipleship includes the idea of one who intentionally learns by inquiry and observation (cf [inductive Bible study](#)) and thus **mathetes** is more than a mere pupil. A **mathetes** describes an adherent of a teacher.

**Hendriksen** - The argument was begun by the disciples of John, who probably ascribed superior (or exclusive) purifying efficacy to the baptism of their teacher.

**Wiersbe** agrees "It appears that some of John's disciples started the argument. It began on doctrinal grounds—the matter of purifying—but soon moved to personal grounds." (BEC)

**Purification** (2512) (**katharismos** from **katharizo** = to cleanse and our English word **catharsis** which Webster's defines as purification or purgation that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension) describes the process of making clean, cleansing, purifying, freeing from filth. Although the cleansing could refer to literal cleansing from physical stain or contamination, all NT uses refer to cleansing either from the "stain" of sin, an "inward contamination" (Heb 1:3+, 2Pe 1:9+) or ritual cleansing as prescribed in the law of Moses (Mk 1:44+, Lk 2:22+, Lk 5:14+) or by Jewish customs (Jn 2:6+).

**John 3:26 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."**

NET John 3:26 So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River, about whom you testified—see, he is baptizing, and everyone is flocking to him!"

GNT John 3:26 κα λθον πρς τν ω ννην κα επαν ατ, αββ, ς ν μετ σο πραν το ορδ νου, σ μεμαρτ ρηκας, δε ο τος βαπτ ζει κα π ντες ρχονται πρ ς α τ ν.

NLT John 3:26 So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

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

ESV John 3:26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness-- look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

NIV John 3:26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

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

CSB John 3:26 So they came to John and told him, "Rabbi, the One you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing-- and everyone is flocking to Him."

NKJ John 3:26 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!"

NRS John 3:26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

YLT John 3:26 and they came unto John, and said to him, 'Rabbi, he who was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou didst testify, lo, this one is baptizing, and all are coming unto him.'

NAB John 3:26 So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him."

NJB John 3:26 so they went to John and said, 'Rabbi, the man who was with you on the far side of the Jordan, the man to whom you bore witness, is baptising now, and everyone is going to him.'

GWN John 3:26 So they went to John and asked him, "Rabbi, do you remember the man you spoke so favorably about when he was with you on the other side of the Jordan River? Well, he's baptizing, and everyone is going to him!"

BBE John 3:26 And they went to John and said to him, Rabbi, the man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the man to whom you gave witness, is now giving baptism, and everyone is going to him.

- **Rabbi.** Jn 3:2. Jn 1:38.
- **he who.** Nu 11:26-29. Eccl 4:4. 1 Co 3:3-5. Ga 5:20, 21. 6:12, 13. Jas 3:14-18. 4:5, 6.
- **beyond the Jordan.** Jn 1:28, Jn 10:40, Mt 19:1.
- **to whom.** Jn 1:7, 15, 26-36.
- **He is baptizing.** Jn 3:22.
- **and all.** Ge 2:24. Jn 1:7, 9. Jn 11:48. 12:19. Ps 65:2. Is 45:23. Acts 19:26, 27.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS TO SUPERSEDE JOHN'S

**John MacArthur** - This section may be divided into three parts that highlight the significance of what was occurring in relationship to John's and Jesus' ministry:

1. John the Baptist constituted the end of the old age (John 3:25–29);
2. the transition to Jesus' ministry (v. 30); and
3. Jesus' ministry as constituting the beginning of the new age (vv. 31–36). Instead of jealousy, John exhibited humble faithfulness to the superiority of Jesus' person and ministry.

**And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi (*rhabbi*), He Who was with you beyond the Jordan (Jn 1:28+), to Whom you have testified** - In this passage John's disciples exposed their competitive spirit (We never get caught up in a spirit of competition in our church do we? That's rhetorical of course!). What John's disciples clearly lost sight of was John's original mission from God, to prepare the way for the Messiah. They forgot that John's ministry was a **means to an end!** In using **Rabbi** they greet John (only time he is called Rabbi in John's Gospel) just as Jesus was greeted by Nicodemus (Jn 3:2+). Earlier John recorded that John the Baptist "came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him." (Jn 1:7+) and we read of his witness in Jn 1:15+ and Jn 1:26-36+. Notice these disciples of John do not even say the Name "Jesus" but refer to Him only with pronouns! This fact would support their jealousy and envy toward Jesus. **Testified** or witnessed is in the **perfect tense** indicating this witness had begun in the past and had continuing impact, pointing to the abiding influence of John's witness. **Beyond** (**peran**) is an adverb which indicates a position opposite another position, with something intervening, so the idea is on the other side, on the far side, across from.

**Borchert** on **Rabbi** - The designation of the Baptizer by his disciples as "Rabbi" (Lord, Master, or Teacher) is unquestionably intended by the evangelist to pinpoint the contrast between John and Jesus because 3:26 is the only place in the Gospel where the title "Rabbi" refers to someone other than Jesus (cf. 1:38; 6:25; 9:22; 11:8; as well as 20:16, where the heightened form "Rabboni" is used after the resurrection). (NAC-Jn)



**Rabbi** (4461) see note on [rhabbi](#). All uses - Matt. 23:7; Matt. 23:8; Matt. 26:25; Matt. 26:49; Mk. 9:5; Mk. 11:21; Mk. 14:45; Jn. 1:38; Jn. 1:49; Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:26; Jn. 4:31; Jn. 6:25; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 11:8 See also [Was Jesus a rabbi?](#)

**You have testified** (witnessed) (3140) ([martureo](#) from [martus/martys](#) = witness = one who has information or knowledge of something and can bring to light or confirm something. English = **martyr**) in its most basic sense refers to a legal witness. Thus the verb **martureo** means to be a witness, to testify, to give evidence, to give testimony, to bear record, to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something. The words testified related to fact, not opinion, as in a courtroom setting. Uses of [martureo](#) in John's Gospel. First 5 uses refer to the witness of John the Baptist.- Jn. 1:7+; Jn. 1:8+; Jn. 1:15+; Jn. 1:32+; Jn. 1:34+; Jn. 2:25; Jn. 3:11+; Jn. 3:26+; Jn. 3:28+; Jn. 3:32+; Jn. 4:39+; Jn. 4:44+; Jn. 5:31; Jn. 5:32; Jn. 5:33; Jn. 5:36; Jn. 5:37; Jn. 5:39; Jn. 7:7; Jn. 8:13; Jn. 8:14; Jn. 8:18; Jn. 10:25; Jn. 12:17; Jn. 13:21; Jn. 15:26; Jn. 15:27; Jn. 18:23; Jn. 18:37; Jn. 19:35; Jn. 21:24

**Behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him** - This passage pictures "Jealousy 101!" Their words seem to carry the implied question "*What are you going to do about it?*" In other words John's disciples were disturbed (jealous, envious, etc) that so many Jews were turning away from John to Jesus. "Without realizing it, John's disciples were putting him into a situation of competing against the Lord Jesus!" (Wiersbe) It is doubtful that truly "**all**" were coming to Jesus, but as **Hendriksen** points out John's disciples "make full use of the figure of speech called hyperbole, "All are going to him," i.e., soon you'll be without any follower!" (Ibid)

**THOUGHT** - John did not want anyone to follow him; his ministry was to point to the Lamb of God and urge people to trust Him. But when two popular preachers are involved in similar work, it is easy for both friends and enemies to get caught up in competition and comparison....It is interesting to note that four of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem of comparison and competition: Moses (Nu 11:26-30), John the Baptist (John 3:26-30), Jesus (Luke 9:46-50), and Paul (Php 1:15-18). A leader often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics! (Wiersbe - BEC)

**Guzik** - John's disciples seem alarmed, but it didn't bother John one bit. John would not allow envy or the fickle crowds make him forget his mission: to announce that the Messiah had come, and then to step back.

**Steven Cole** - John's disciples were concerned because the numbers in his following were going down, while the numbers following Jesus were going up. And John didn't seem to be doing anything to correct the situation. But when they talk to John about their concerns, he explains that their cause for concern was his cause for great joy. John wasn't trying to build a following for John, but rather a following for Jesus. Sometimes a man's disciples are more zealous for his reputation than he is. On one occasion when the Spirit came on two young men in the camp of Israel so that they prophesied, Joshua, who was Moses' helper, said (Num. 11:28), "Moses, my lord, restrain them." But Moses replied (11:29), "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" A similar thing happened when the apostle John saw someone casting out demons in Jesus' name and tried to prevent him, because he wasn't part of their group. But Jesus replied (Mark 9:39), "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me." The lesson is, we aren't in competition with other churches or other ministries. If they're preaching the gospel and teaching God's Word, then we're on the same team. We can rejoice that the Lord's work is prospering, even if our work is not as large as the other work. Our responsibility is to be faithful with what the Lord has given us to do. ([A Lesson in Humility](#))

**Behold** (2396) ([ide](#) is the [aorist imperative](#) of [eido](#) = to see) used as a demonstrative particle to prompt attention = pay attention, and followed by a statement to identify who or what is to be given attention. (1) to focus attention; (a) on a significant participant in a narrative, like behold!; here is (are), this in none other than (Mk 3:34; Jn 1:29); (b) on a significant place (Mk 16:6); (2) to introduce something for special attention; (a) because it is contrary to the hearer's expectation there now! take note! look! (Jn 3:26); (b) because it requires the hearer's response listen! see there! pay attention now! (Mk 15:4) Uses in John - Jn 1:29 - "**Behold**, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"; Jn. 1:36; Jn. 1:47; Jn. 3:26; Jn. 5:14; Jn. 7:26; Jn. 11:3; Jn. 11:36; Jn. 12:19; Jn. 16:29; Jn. 19:4; Jn. 19:14; Jn. 19:26; Jn. 19:27

**Baptizing** (907) see note on [baptizo](#)

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**Barton - CHRISTIAN" COMPETITIVENESS** - We Christians must always remember the primary focus of our ministry: to exalt Christ and point people to him. Healthy relationships with other Christians will include our recognition of certain leaders, pastors, and teachers. But we must always remember that they, too, have the same commission. We should not allow ourselves to become prideful of the particular church, group, or leader with which we are associated. And we must do our utmost to resist any kind of competitive spirit. All of us are under the sovereignty of God. Envious or bitter comparisons make us ineffective. Our task is to follow Christ and see that he is exalted. (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

## John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

NET John 3:27 John replied, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven.

GNT John 3:27 πεκρθη ω ννης κα ε πεν, Ο δ ναι νθρωπος λαμβ νει ο δ ν ν μ δεδομ νον ατ κ το ο ρανο .

NLT John 3:27 John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven.

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

ESV John 3:27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

NIV John 3:27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.

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

CSB John 3:27 John responded, "No one can receive a single thing unless it's given to him from heaven.

NKJ John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

NRS John 3:27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven.

YLT John 3:27 John answered and said, 'A man is not able to receive anything, if it may not have been given him from the heaven;

NAB John 3:27 John answered and said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven.

NJB John 3:27 John replied: 'No one can have anything except what is given him from heaven.

GWN John 3:27 John answered, "People can't receive anything unless it has been given to them from heaven.

BBE John 3:27 And this was John's answer: A man is unable to have anything if it is not given to him from heaven.

- **A man.** Nu 16:9-11. 17:5. 1 Ch 28:4, 5. Je 1:5. 17:16. Am 7:15. Mt 25:15. Mk 13:34. Ro 1:5. 12:6. 1 Co 1:1. 2:12-14. 3:5. 4:7. 12:11. 15:10. Ga 1:1. Ep 1:1. 3:7, 8. 1 Ti 2:7. Jas 1:17. 1 Pe 4:10, 11.
- **receive.** He 5:4, 5.
- **unless** Mt 4:9.
- **has been given.** Jn 4:10. 6:65. 17:2. 1 Ch 29:14. Is 55:11. Ro 9:16. 1 Co 3:7. 4:7. Php 2:12, 13. Jas 1:17, 18. 1 Pe 4:10. 1 Jn 5:20.
- **from heaven.** Ps 73:9. Jn 19:11. Mt 21:25. Mk 11:30, 31.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Here are some paraphrases of this passage - 'No one can do anything unless God in heaven allows it' [CEV], 'A man can only get what God gives him' [NCV], 'No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven' [NLT], 'No one can have anything unless God gives it' [TEV],

### JOHN'S SELF-EFFACING ANSWER

**Self-effacing** means not drawing attention to oneself, modest, tending to make oneself, one's actions, etc, inconspicuous, esp because of humility and a sense of the worthiness of another. John points his finger to Jesus. **Hendriksen** comments on John the Baptist's self-effacing response to his disciples - "Let those in Asia Minor who follow him take it to heart, so that they may know that when they place John above Jesus they sin not only against the latter but also against the former!" (Ibid)

John knew how to give glory where glory was due!

-- Bruce Barton

This is John the Baptist's last testimony in this gospel regarding Christ. As his ministry faded away, Jesus' ministry moved to the forefront. In spite of the fact that John the Baptist received widespread fame in Israel and was generally accepted by the common people of the land as well as those who were social outcasts, his testimony regarding Jesus was rejected, especially by the leaders of Israel (cf. Matt. 3:5–10; Luke 7:29).

**Barton** writes that "John exemplifies the kind of exuberant endorsement that ought to come from us when we hear that someone is being effective as a servant of Christ." (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

**THOUGHT** - Are you as convicted as I am? Do you ever have a tinge of envy when you hear of another's wonderful ministry? O my, to one day be totally rid of this horrid fallen flesh!

**John Phillips** - John the baptist was free from that dark spirit of professional jealousy which seizes the souls of some preachers when they contemplate someone in the ministry who seems to be having more success than they. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**John MacArthur** - God had sovereignly granted him his ministry (cf. Ro 1:5; 1 Cor. 4:7; 15:10; Eph. 3:7; 1 Tim. 2:7); if God now chose to change or end that ministry, John was content. Everything among God's servants, including popular ministry, is a gracious gift from God, not something to which a person is entitled. Therefore there is no place for jealousy, as John's self-effacing reply indicated (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven** - This verse drips with the honey of grace! Sovereign grace is God's giving to the undeserving! John's anointing to be a voice crying in the wilderness was not from himself but was from God. His message of repentance to prepare the way of the Lord was also not his message but was from God. **Given from Heaven** means given from God. **Given** is in the [perfect tense](#) which speaks of it being **given** (it is also in the divine passive) at some point in time in the past and with continuing effect. John's point is that all blessing and ministry are from God [cp Jas 1:17, Ro 11:36], which should put a stop to all competition! "Paul would have agreed with this (1 Cor. 3:1–9; 4:1–7). Our gifts and opportunities come from God, and He alone must get the glory." (Wiersbe) Would it be that this were so in all our churches! God is the Giver of every good gift and thus He alone deserves the glory! We can do nothing that He does not initiate and then work through us to complete (cp Jn 15:5, 2 Cor 3:5,6+).

A Christ exalting ministry is not achieved but received!

**Hendriksen** - The herald of the Christ meant to say that to every one God has assigned a place in his eternal plan, and that he, the Baptist, has no right to lay claim to an honor which had not been given to him in heaven. Once given, it remains given, as the tense used (**given** in [perfect tense](#)) in the original implies. Similarly, once withheld, it so remains. Instead of complaining about the success of Jesus, John's disciples should have rejoiced in the fact that the task of the Baptist was being fulfilled.(BNTC-Jn)

Most significantly this divine principle applies to the ultimate gift, the gift of salvation from God, Jesus affirming

And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that (ABSOLUTELY)**no one can** ([dunamai](#) - HAS THE INHERENT POWER/ABILITY TO) **come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.**" (Jn 6:65, cf Jn 19:11)

**D A Carson** writes "God's sovereignty stands hidden behind all human claims, for a human being does not have anything but what he has received....All gifts come from heaven (a reverential circumlocution for 'from God'), including the call to a particular station in the stream of redemptive history. For John the Baptist to have wished he were someone else, called to serve in a way many would judge more prominent, would simply be covetousness by another name; if the person he envied were the Messiah himself, he would be annulling the excellent ministry God had given him. Deep discontent over God's wise, sovereign disposition of people and things would in that instance betray not only unbelief and faithlessness, but the worst form of the perennial human sin, the arrogance that wants to be God and stand where God stands." Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 210)

**THOUGHT** - Are there people in your life that you have found yourself resenting simply because they may be more gifted than you or have enjoyed more success than you? If there are then I would suggest that you at this very moment take time to not only thank the Lord for His eternal plan but also that you would thank Him for all those that He is using to accomplish His eternal plan... When we loose track of the truth that everything that we have has been received from the hand of God, not only can it lead us to becoming resentful of others, but it can also lead us to become boastful in terms of ourselves. Again take a moment and consider your life. Are there certain successes that you are enjoying that cause you to think more highly of yourself than you ought? Most of you will most likely say, I don't think so. But let me ask you a question when you find yourself successful at something, what is your response? Is it to sit back with a sense of personal satisfaction basking in the glow of that success, or do you quickly go into the presence of God through prayer and give Him thanks for entrusting you with the gifts and talents that He has bestowed on you that made that success possible. So,

whether we are looking at our success, or the success of others, the proper philosophy for us to have is this, "A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven." ([Valley Bible Church](#))

**THOUGHT** - This is such an important lesson to keep in mind at all times: All of my gifts, abilities, and opportunities come from God by grace alone. Everything! Do I have a sound mind? That came from God, who wants me to use it for His purpose and glory. Do I have money? That came from God, who wants me to use it for His purpose and glory. Do I have a ministry or place of service? That, too, came from God, who wants me to use it for His purpose and glory. John knew that he was the forerunner of the Messiah, and he sought to fulfill that ministry which God had given him. (Steven Cole)

**Receive** ([2983](#)) ([lambano](#)) means to receive or accept something (an object or benefit) for which the initiative rests with the giver (in this case God), but the focus of attention in the transfer is upon the receiver (John the Baptist).

James writes...

**Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights** with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ([James 1:17+](#))

Peter writes

**As each one has received a special gift**, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pe 4:10, [11+](#))

This passage makes me think of Paul's words to the Corinthians

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider **anything as coming from ourselves**, but **our adequacy is from God**, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ([2 Cor 3:5-6+](#)).

Again Paul writes

For who regards you as superior? **What do you have that you did not receive?** (RHETORICAL! NOTHING!) And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? ([1 Cor 4:7](#))

The psalmist puts it this way

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. Ps 115:1

**Spurgeon** - The repetition of the words, Not unto us, would seem to indicate a very serious desire to renounce any glory which they might at any time have proudly appropriated to themselves, and it also sets forth the vehemence of their wish that God would at any cost to them magnify his own name. They loathed the idea of seeking their own glory, and rejected the thought with the utmost detestation; again and again disclaiming any self glorifying motive in their supplication.

**Stephen Charnock**. - The Psalmist, by this repetition (Not to us, O LORD, not to us,), implies our natural tendency to self idolatry, and to magnifying of ourselves, and the difficulty of cleansing our hearts from these self reflections. If it be angelical to refuse an undue glory stolen from God's throne, Revelation 12:8-9; it is diabolical to accept and cherish it. "To seek our own glory is not glory," Proverbs 25:27. It is vile, and the dishonour of a creature, who, by the law of his creation, is referred to another end. So much as we sacrifice to our own credit, to the dexterity of our hands, or the sagacity of our wit, we detract from God.

**Thomas Manton**. - This is not a doxology, or form of thanksgiving, but a prayer. Not for our safety or welfare, so much as for Thy glory, be pleased to deliver us. Not to satisfy our revenge upon our adversaries; not for the establishment of our own interest; but for the glory of Thy grace and truth do we seek Thine aid, that Thou mayest be known to be a God keeping covenant; for mercy and truth are the two pillars of that covenant. It is a great dishonouring of God when anything is sought from Him more than Himself, or not for Himself. Saith Austin, it is but a carnal affection in prayer when men seek self more than God. Self and God are the two things that come in competition. Now there are several sorts of self; there is carnal self, natural self, spiritual self, and glorified self; above all these God must have the preeminence.

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## Barton - REAL SUCCESS

To what degree is success the mark of God's blessing or approval? If God guarantees success to those who really serve him, is he limited to fulfilling their expectations of success? The answer in both cases is clearly no. Both John and Jesus were successful in their missions, but the first lost his head; the second was crucified. God's idea of blessing is quite different from ours. God calls us to be faithful where we are, with his plan for us. We are not to carry out anyone else's plan. Someday we will probably be amazed at the variety of people to whom God says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21 NIV). Let's make sure we share in the delight of hearing those words directed at us. That objective will require that we center our living on what God directs us to do through his Word rather than trying to live up to the expectations of neighbors or our culture. (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

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**Steven Cole** - (**ILLUSTRATION**) In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Linus tells Charlie Brown, "When I get big, I'm going to be a humble little country doctor. I'll live in the city, see, and every morning I'll get up, climb into my sports car, and zoom into the country! Then I'll start healing people... I'll heal people for miles around!" In the last frame, he exclaims, "I'll be a world famous humble little country doctor!" Charles Schultz, the cartoonist, was poking fun at how difficult it is for us to be humble. We may start out with the goal of being a humble little whatever, but before we know it, we're into being a world-famous, humble little whatever!

Pride is arguably the most deadly and evil of all sins because it's at the root of all other sins. Pride was probably Satan's original sin, when he said, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14, assuming that this in some sense is describing Satan). Pride was the bait Satan used to tempt Eve, when he set aside what God had said and assured her that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, she would be like God (Gen. 3:1-6). Whenever I sin, I am arrogantly asserting that I know better than God knows what is best for me. Thus, as Christians we must constantly battle pride and grow in humility. And if you think you've attained any measure of humility, you've got to be on guard against being proud of your humility!

If anyone easily could have fallen into the trap of pride, it would have been John the Baptist. Who else in human history (apart from Jesus Himself) could claim to have been filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15)! No one else in human history had the important role of being the forerunner of Messiah (Luke 1:17, 76). John enjoyed immediate popular success, as all Jerusalem, Judea, and those from surrounding areas were going out to him in the wilderness to confess their sins and be baptized (Matt. 3:5-6). Even Jesus testified of John that he was the greatest man in human history (Matt. 11:11). All these things could have fed the pride of this young prophet, barely in his thirties. ([A Lesson in Humility](#))

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**Brian Bell** - If someone is prospering or displaying gifts superior to yours its because God has given it to him/her. What a tragedy when God gives us something we are lusting for...that isn't best for us. Ps.106:14,15(Numb.11) But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness (for meat), And tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request (quail), But sent leanness into their soul. Old German Proverb, "Jealousy eats nothing but its own heart!" God gives each man his gifts...take it up with God if you have a problem! God's in control of the blessing department! Recognize & accept what God has given to you; Recognize & accept what God has not given to you. . John knew a teachable moment when he saw one. But, How to squelch jealousy? When Jealousy knocks on your door do you open it? How do you handle it? What if, like John, you are Outdone, Outclassed, or Eclipsed? What kept John from bitterness? He informed them you can only receive what is given to you from heaven! He knew he was from earth, but Jesus was from heaven. Earthling vs. Unearthly/Otherworldly If all ministry is from heaven, then do we have a right to be jealous of another man's ministry, gifts, abilities, accomplishments? [Imp insight into John's character] His response threw cold water on his inflamed disciples, quenching the conversation and their competitive spirit.

Brian Bell on 4 ways to keep from Jealousy:

1. See the Big Picture; (Jn 3:27)
2. Be Secure in who you are; (Jn 3:28, 29)
3. Have Joy to the Full; (Jn 3:29b)
4. Have Pure humility. (Jn 3:30)

**John 3:28 "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'**

NET John 3:28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but rather, 'I have been sent before him.'

GNT John 3:28 α το με ς μοι μαρτυρε τε τι επον [τι] Ο κ ε μ γ Χριστ ς, λλ τι πεσταλμ νος ε μ μπροσθεν κε νου.

NLT John 3:28 You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare

the way for him.'

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

ESV John 3:28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'

NIV John 3:28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'

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

CSB John 3:28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of Him.'

NKJ John 3:28 "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

NRS John 3:28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.'

YLT John 3:28 ye yourselves do testify to me that I said, I am not the Christ, but, that I am having been sent before him;

NAB John 3:28 You yourselves can testify that I said (that) I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him.

NJB John 3:28 'You yourselves can bear me out. I said, "I am not the Christ; I am the one who has been sent to go in front of him."

GWN John 3:28 You are witnesses that I said, 'I'm not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.'

BBE John 3:28 You yourselves give witness that I said, I am not the Christ. What I said was, I am sent before the Christ.

- **I said.** Jn 1:20, 25, 27.
- **but.** Jn 1:6, 15, 23. Mal 3:1. 4:4, 5. Mt 3:3, 11, 12. Mk 1:2, 3. Lk 1:16, 17, 76. 3:4-6. Ac 19:4.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOHN EMPHASIZES HE WAS A FORERUNNER OF CHRIST

**You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,'**- John had never vacillated or wavered in his message (and neither should we beloved)! He had begun his race exalting Christ and would end his race exalting Christ, not attempting to replace Christ! **Not** signifies absolute negation. In John 1:8+ he said "He was **not** the Light (CHRIST), but he came to testify about the Light." When ask by the religious leaders, "he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (Jn 1:20+) John's declaration was repeatedly crystal clear so that his ministry would be clearly distinguished from that of the Messiah.

Humility stems from understanding that I am not the Christ.

-- Steven Cole

**D A Carson** - Unlike many preachers for whom humility is little more than an affectation, John meant what he said. Both John and Jesus were given their roles by heaven (Jn 3:27), and John was entirely content with his. Small wonder that the assessment of John provided by both Jesus (Mt. 11:7–11) and the fourth Evangelist (Jn 10:40–42) is so positive. Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**THOUGHT** - You may think, "Well, there's not much danger that I'm going to start thinking that I'm the Christ." But as I've often said, one of the most basic lessons that we all have to learn-and learn again and again-is that God is God; I am not God. When things don't go the way I'd prefer, I have to learn to bow and acknowledge, "God, You're God; I'm not God." Also, although I've never had to deal with it (and probably never will), when your ministry is popular and you've got crowds of people thronging to hear you speak, you need to keep in mind, "I'm not the Christ; I'm just His lowly slave, sent to point people to Him." (Steven Cole)

**Are witnesses** ([present tense](#) - continually) ([3140](#)) see note on [martureo](#)

**Christ** (Anointed One)([5547](#))(**Christos** from **chrío** = to rub or anoint, consecrate to an office) describes one who has been anointed with oil, one who has been consecrated. The majority of the NT uses refer to Jesus (exceptions = "false Christs" - Mt 24:24, Mk 13:22). Christos describes one who has been anointed, symbolizing appointment to a task. It is used here as the title "Anointed One" and is the Greek synonym for

"Messiah." Christos is used in the [Septuagint](#) describing everyone anointed with the holy oil, especially the priesthood (Lev. 4:5+, Lev 4:16+) and it is also a name applied to those who were acting as redeemers like Cyrus.

#### Related Resources:

- Messiah = [messias](#)
- [Messiah - Anointed One](#)
- [Is Jesus the Messiah?](#)
- [What does Messiah mean?](#)
- [Why do most Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah?](#)
- [Does the Old Testament truly predict a second advent of the Messiah?](#)

**But, 'I have been sent ahead of Him** - John succinctly states his divine assignment, what he had received from Heaven. Ahead of Him (emprosthen) means in "Before that One (Christ." In front of Him in time but never in front of Him in position. In other words, he was Jesus' [forerunner](#). His precursor, predecessor, harbinger and herald whose mission was to announce the approaching appearance of Christ.

The measure of success for any ministry is not how many people follow the minister, but how many people follow Christ through the minister.

--- John MacArthur

Earlier "John said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." (Jn 1:23+)

Mark wrote "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'" (Mark 1:2-3+)

**Have been sent** ([649](#)) ([apostello](#) from **apo** = from, away from + **stello** = to withdraw from, avoid) means to send off, to send forth, to send out. To send out; to commission as a representative, an ambassador, an envoy. The idea is to send forth from one place to another. But the meaning of apostello is more than just to send because it means "to send off on a commission to do something as one's personal representative, with credentials furnished" (Wuest)

**J C Ryle** says that here we see "a splendid pattern of true and godly humility. We see in John the Baptist a very different spirit from that displayed by his disciples. He begins by laying down the great principle, that acceptance with man is a special gift of God; and that we must therefore not presume to find fault, when others have more acceptance than ourselves. "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." He goes on to remind his followers of his repeated declaration, that one greater than himself was coming;—"I said, I am not the Christ." He tells them that his office compared to that of Christ, is that of the bridegroom's friend, compared to the bridegroom. And finally, he solemnly affirms, that Christ must and will become greater and greater, and that he himself must become less and less important, until, like a star eclipsed by the rising sun, he has completely disappeared. **A frame of mind like this, is the highest degree of grace to which mortal man can attain.** The greatest saint in the sight of God, is the man who is most thoroughly "clothed with humility." (1 Peter 5:5+) Would we know the prime secret of being men of the stamp of Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and St. Paul, and John the Baptist? They were all eminently humble men. Living at different ages, and enjoying very different degrees of light, in this matter at least they were all agreed. In themselves they saw nothing but sin and weakness. To God they gave all the praise of what they were. Let us walk in their steps. Let us covet earnestly the best gifts; but above all, let us covet humility. The way to true honour is to be humble. No man ever was so praised by Christ, as the very man who says here, "I must decrease," the humble John the Baptist.

**John 3:29 "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. So this joy of mine has been made full.**

NET John 3:29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This then is my joy, and it is complete.

GNT John 3:29 χων τ ν ν μφην νυμφος σ τ ν· δ φ λος το νυμφου σ τηκς κα κο ων α το χαρ χαρει δι

τ ν φων ν το νυμφ ου. ατη ο ν χαρ μ πεπλ ρωται.

NLT John 3:29 It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success.

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

ESV John 3:29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

NIV John 3:29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

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

CSB John 3:29 He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete.

NKJ John 3:29 "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.

NRS John 3:29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled.

YLT John 3:29 he who is having the bride is bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom, who is standing and hearing him, with joy doth rejoice because of the voice of the bridegroom; this, then, my joy hath been fulfilled.

NAB John 3:29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete.

NJB John 3:29 'It is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy I feel, and it is complete.

GWN John 3:29 "The groom is the person to whom the bride belongs. The best man, who stands and listens to him, is overjoyed when the groom speaks. This is the joy that I feel.

BBE John 3:29 He who has the bride is the husband: but the husband's friend, whose place is by his side and whose ears are open to him, is full of joy because of the husband's voice: such is my joy, and it is complete.

- **has the bride** Ps 45:9-17. SS 3:11. 4:8-12. Is 54:5. 62:4, 5. Je 2:2. Ezek 16:8. Ho 2:19, 20. Mt 22:2. 25:1. 2 Co 11:2. Ep 5:25-27. Rev 19:7-9. 21:9.
- **the friend.** Jdg 14:10, 11, 20. P s 45:14. Song 5:1. Mt 9:15.
- **So this joy** Jn 15:11. Is 66:11. Lk 2:10-14. 15:6. 1 Pe 1:8.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOHN WAS JESUS' "BEST MAN!"

John emphasizes with a well-known picture that he and Jesus are not rivals or in competition. This is like a mini-parable depicting his relationship to Christ.

**Borchert** - To clarify for his disciples what he meant, therefore, the Baptizer used a typical Jewish type of parable, drawn from Jewish marriage customs. At that time the bridegroom normally selected one or two close friends to escort the bride to the bridegroom's marriage chamber and to wait outside the room or tent for the bridegroom's shout and often for receipt of tokens that the marriage had been consummated with his virgin bride. Such friends of the bridegroom were thus able to certify to the wedding guests that the consummation of the marriage had taken place and the joyous festivities could continue (cf. Jn 3:29). John gladly accepted his role as a friend of the bridegroom. Just as he had earlier willingly turned over his disciples to Jesus in a self-giving act (Jn 1:35-37), here he expressed his genuine joy that Jesus was being accepted by the people. This brief parable, therefore, serves as a powerful illustration.

**He who has the bride is the bridegroom** - To whom does this refer? Clearly Christ is the **bridegroom** and John is the **friend of the bridegroom**. The The groomsmen's joy is to stay nearby the groom during the marriage ceremony, and vows.



Who is the bride in this "parable"? Some say this is the church and some say it is the [believing remnant of Israel](#).

**Gotquestions** writes - John said, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom," and by this he referred to Jesus and the church, His spiritual bride, who stands by His side and invites people in, saying, "'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17). ([Reference](#))

**John MacArthur** - Bringing the [faithful remnant of Israel](#) (depicted in the Old Testament as the bride of the Lord; cf. Isa 54:5–6; Isaiah 62:4–5; Jer. 2:2; 31:32; Hos. 2:16–20) to Christ was the culmination of John's ministry as His forerunner. (Ibid)

**D A Carson** actually mentions both considerations - We cannot imagine that John the Baptist was ignorant of the many Old Testament passages that depict Israel or the [faithful](#) within Israel as the bride of the LORD (e.g. Is. 62:4–5; Je. 2:2; Ho. 2:16–20). Rather obliquely John is therefore also saying that the Jesus he has introduced to the [faithful remnant in Israel](#) is none other than Israel's King and Messiah. Jesus may allude to the same heritage of understanding in Mark 2:19+. The Evangelist could not have been unaware of the fact that the post-resurrection church would picture Christ as the bridegroom and his church as the bride—the continuation and transformation of the Old Testament theme (e.g. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25–27; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)

**Warren Wiersbe** likewise mentions both considerations - The image of the Bridegroom would have been significant to the Jewish people, for Jehovah had a "marriage covenant" with the nation (Isa. 54:5; 62:4ff; Jer. 2:2; 3:20; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:19ff). Alas, Israel had been unfaithful to her vows, and God had to put her away temporarily. Today, God is calling out a people for His name, the church, the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:1–3; Eph. 5:22–33). One day the Bridegroom will come to claim His bride and take her to her home in heaven (Rev. 19:6–9; 21:9ff). (BEC)

**Borchert** - The symbol of marriage, of course, has been employed as a striking picture of the relationship between Christ and his church and as Schnackenburg correctly observed has given rise to "the allegory of the Church as the bride of Christ" (e.g., Eph 5:23–33; Rev 19:7–8). The Gnostics pressed this imagery much further and were charged by the heresiologists like Irenaeus with immoral activity in the name of spiritual experiences. How widespread the immorality was among the Gnostics is debated today. But in the Gospel of Philip the highest sacrament was known as the bridal chamber, clearly confirming the view that in Gnostic spirituality marriage language was found to be very important in describing the intimacy and power of the experience. (NAC-Jn)

**Steven Cole** - In the Old Testament, Yahweh is often pictured as the bridegroom (or husband) and Israel as His bride. For example, in Isaiah 54:5, the Lord tells Israel, "For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 62:5b declares, "And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you." In Hosea 2:16, the Lord tells Israel that in the future, they will call the Lord, "My husband." He promises (Hos. 2:19), "I will betroth you to Me forever..." Jesus used this analogy of Himself when He explained to some of John's disciples why Jesus' disciples did not fast (Matt. 9:15): "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." The same analogy carries over to the New Testament epistles, where Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is His bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25–27; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17). Now, if Yahweh is Israel's bridegroom in the Old Testament and John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as Israel's bridegroom here, then it's an affirmation that Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is God. Whether or not John the Baptist put the two halves of this equation together, it is evident that the apostle John through the Holy Spirit wants us to put them together: If God is the bridegroom and Jesus is the bridegroom, then Jesus is God. The lesson in humility for us is: humility stems from knowing who God is. The clearer our vision of His majesty and greatness and power and glory, the more we will be humbled in His presence. As I've said before, this is one of the main lessons that I came away with the first time I read Calvin's Institutes [Westminster Press]. He presents such an exalted view of God, whom he often calls "the Majesty," that you just bow yourself in the dust before Him. In Calvin's words (1.1.3), "Man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty." You realize how little you are in His holy presence. ([A Lesson in Humility](#))

**Gilbrant** writes "As "the friend of the bridegroom," John the Baptist rejoiced that he had a part in bringing the Church to her Lord. The Hebrew wedding was a joyful time. The Baptist here parallels the two, the analogy with the reality. He had shared his joy in wooing the Bride for Christ. His ministry was similar to Abraham's servant who presented the invitation to Rebekah in behalf of

Isaac. No image is so intimate as a wedding. Jesus began His ministry at a wedding (John 2). He will complete His work at His own wedding banquet (Revelation 19:1-7). (Complete Biblical Library – John)

**But the friend of the bridegroom**-When you go to a wedding, other than the bride, who is the focus of attention? It is the bridegroom, not the best man or [groomsman](#). John says, "I'm the best man, not the groom." As **Carson** says John pictures himself as "the ancient equivalent of a 'best man' who organized the details and presided over a Judean wedding (Galilean weddings were ordered on somewhat different lines)." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#)) **MacArthur** adds "He was even responsible for bringing the bride to the bridegroom to begin the wedding ceremony. Having done that, his task was completed; the focus now rightfully shifted from him to the bridegroom. There is good evidence that according to ancient Mesopotamian law the friend of the bridegroom was forbidden under any circumstances to marry the bride, even if the bridegroom rejected her."

**Ron Mattoon** adds that "John the Baptist was the **shoshben** or the liaison between the bride and the groom. He acted as a negotiator between the two families. He arranged the wedding and gave out the invitations. He also presided at the wedding feast. He was responsible for bringing the bride and groom together. His special duty was to guard the bridal chamber and let no false lover inside of it. He would open the door only when in the dark he heard the groom's voice. He let the groom inside and went away rejoicing because the two lovers were finally together. Bringing the couple together was his job. Once he did this he faded off the scene.

[Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers](#) - The "friend of the bridegroom"—called by the Hebrews "Shōshbēn," and by the Greeks "Paranymph"—was charged with the preliminaries of the marriage. He arranged the contract, acted for the bridegroom during the betrothal, and arranged for, and presided at, the festivities of the wedding-day itself. It was a position of honour, in proportion to the position of the bridegroom himself, and was given to his **chief friend. That friend then joyed in his joy, and there was none brighter on that day than he.** This in John's thought is an illustration of his own position. The bridegroom is the Messiah; the bride is the Kingdom of God—the church, consisting of all who with pure hearts are willing to receive Him; the **friend** who has arranged the betrothal, who has prepared these hearts, is John himself. He now stands and hears the **Bridegroom**. Some of those who had been prepared by him for the Bridegroom would have come, it may be, and told him of his words. He is now near at hand. Throngs crowd to Him. The bride is approaching. Do they see in all this matter for envy? **It is to him the consummation of all hopes. The life-work has not been in vain. The cup runs over. The joy is fulfilled.**

**DON'T STEAL THE SHOW!** He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:30. Recently I listened to a musician who played so magnificently that I forgot the performer in the beauty of his performance. He is a great artist who can fade out in the glory of his art. He is a great preacher who can get lost in his message. He is a great Christian in whom Christ is magnified whether by life or by death. I have read of a lamplighter in the old days who went along the street at dusk starting the flame in each of the lamps, fading away in the gathering darkness but leaving the lights he had kindled. So does the true Christian bow out to let Christ take the stage. **The friend of the Bridegroom does not steal the show!** (Vance Havner)

**Who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice**- **Rejoices greatly** is literally "with joy does continually rejoice." The verb [chairō](#) is used here with the noun [chara](#) (joy, rejoicing, gladness), to express intense joy and in the [present tense](#) describes this as the **friend of the bridegroom's** continual emotion. We see a similar use [chairō](#) with [chara](#) in Mt 2:10+ describing the magi "When they saw the star, they **rejoiced** exceedingly with great **joy**." (cf use in Septuagint - Jonah 4:6)

What brought John such great joy? One writer says it is the joy of watching the Jews leave him and flock to Jesus. That has to be part of his full joy for I know that every time I have the opportunity to share my Christ with someone, my joy shoots "off the charts" for the rest of the day (whether they receive Him then or reject Him -- no matter, for the Gospel seed has been planted - cf Isa 55:11)!

**Marcus Dods** writes "This is the joy which John claims for himself, the joy of the bridegroom's friend, who arranges the marriage, and this joy is attained in Christ's welcoming to Himself the people whom John has prepared for Him and directed to Him." ([John 3](#))

**Barton** - As the best man, John enjoyed seeing his friend, the bridegroom, honored. He insisted that all the attention should go to the bridegroom and his bride. (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

[Robertson](#) - John is only like the paranymph (paranymphios) or "the friend of the bridegroom." His office is to bring groom and bride together. So he stands expectant (hestēkōs, [perfect tense](#)) and listens (akouōn), [present tense](#) of [akouō] with joy (literally "with joy rejoices") to the music of the bridegroom's voice.

**Steven Cole** has an interesting note on John B - you probably don't think of John the Baptist as a joyful man. He was the austere prophet who thundered (Matt. 3:7), "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He was angry when the religious hypocrites did not follow Jesus. But he was full of joy when he heard the bridegroom's voice and could bring the bride to Him. If people followed after Jesus, John's purpose had been fulfilled. His joy was full.

**So this joy of mine has been made full** - What gave John full joy? The voice of Jesus! Indeed, His voice should give all His disciples full joy. **Has been made full** is in the [perfect tense](#) which means John "stands filled like a cup to the brim with joy." ([Robertson](#)) Carson adds that John's "Gospel repeatedly associates **joy**' with the verb **pleroo** ('to fulfil', 'to complete'); here John the Baptist means that he has the final and ultimate satisfaction of knowing that his God-given (Jn 3:27) ministry has been successful." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

John definitely puts an end to any sense of competition between himself and Jesus by placing himself in the position of the bridegroom's friend or "best man". Once the bridegroom and bride have been brought together, the "best man's" work is completed and he fades off the scene. How foolish it would be for the best man to attempt to upstage the bridegroom, even to the point of trying to take his place! That would be absurd! And that is John's point to his disciples. John hearing of the voice of Jesus gave him joy, joy filled to the brim. While he was still in his mother Elizabeth's womb, John had leaped for joy when he heard the sound of Jesus' mother Mary (Lk 1:41, 44+), which reflects the fact that even before birth John was filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:15+) (So much for the argument that infants in utero are not human beings, even capable of emotional expression!) John the Baptist was content to be the voice announcing the Bridegroom Jesus to be the Word (Jn 1:23+). In the same way he was also content to be the witness pointing others to Jesus, Who was the Light (Jn 1:6, 7, 8+ - see [Merrill Tenney's discussion of the Imagery of John which includes "Light"](#)).

[Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#) - This joy of the friend of the Bridegroom, in full view of the inevitable wane of his own influence and dignity, is in marked contrast to the jealousy and vexation of his disciples.

**Brian Bell** - All work is significant, but only one is preeminent! Jesus = Word; John = Voice. Now, Jesus = Groom; John = Best man. So, why would you pick this guy as your Best Man? He wasn't dressed for success w/camel hair & a leather girdle [that was so last century] He wasn't your politically correct campaign manager (with his abusive rhetoric). He wasn't going to make the next cooking show w/his strange diet, living off the land eating insects, locusts, & wild honey, like Bear Grylls of TV's Man vs. Wild? He was an unconventional eccentric hermit living in the wilderness. Yet, had a uncompromising message of repentance to prepare peoples hearts for the Messiah. He was not chosen for outward fashion, but inward character. 5. He was John the unsung hero, an enigma of a man, sent to: Clear the way; Prepare the way; then Get out of the way for Messiah **a) Clear the way** - to remove obstacles from minds & hearts so they'd be ready to receive Messiah. **b) Prepare the way** - to promote repentance on the part of the nation so He would be accepted. **c) Get out of the way** - to step aside once the Messiah had been introduced. This the toughest part of his job description, & undoubtedly the reason Jesus called him a great man. Mt.11:11a Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist. You might think, oh to be the Best Man!...No! to be the Bride of Christ! John couldn't be bride, he died before Christ went to cross (he was OT) We are the Bride of Christ, not just the friend! Let's finish Mt.11 not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

[Francis Schaeffer](#) asks "Who are we? We are not just those going to heaven. But we are even now the wife of God. We are at this moment the bride of Christ. And what does our divine bridegroom want from us? He wants from us not only doctrinal faithfulness, but our love day by day."

**Rejoice** (5463)(**chairo**) means to be "cheer" full, calmly happy or well-off. **Chairo** implies and imparts joy. **Chairo** is used in a whole range of situations in which the emotion of joy is evoked. To be in a state of happiness and well being (often independent of what is happening when the Source is the Spirit!). **Chairo** means to enjoy a state of gladness, to be delighted. For a Christian there is a true Source of joy, none other than the Lord Himself. Throughout the Old Testament obedience brought God's blessing and gave the Israelites reason to rejoice, but when they rebelled against God, it was He who also brought an end to their rejoicing (cf. Jer 7:34). **Chairo** in John - Jn. 3:29; Jn. 4:36; Jn. 8:56; Jn. 11:15; Jn. 14:28; Jn. 16:20; Jn. 16:22; Jn. 19:3; Jn. 20:20

Several Greek lexicons (Zodhiates, Liddell-Scott, et al) associate the origin of **chairo** with **charis** or grace as follows - **Chairo** is from the root **char-**, "favorably disposed, leaning towards" and cognate with **cháris**, "grace" and so properly means to delight in God's grace ("rejoice") and literally, to experience God's grace (favor) or be conscious (glad) for His grace. It follows that rejoicing ("glad by grace") is principally internal and eternal because it depends only on grace. In contrast, "happiness" is external and temporal (requiring pleasant "happenings"). Thus **Zodhiates** writes "The word **charis** is related to **chairo**, to rejoice, and **chara**, joy, delight, the result of the activity of the grace of God in man."

**Joy** (5479) **chara** is a feeling of great pleasure, of inner gladness, or of delight. **Joy** is an emotion evoked by a sense of well-being. It is a deep feeling of happiness and contentment. **Joy** in the NT is virtually always used to signify a feeling of "happiness" that is based on spiritual realities (independent of what "happens"). **Joy** is a depth of assurance and confidence that ignites a cheerful heart. It is a cheerful heart that leads to cheerful

behavior. **Joy** is not necessarily an experience that comes from favorable circumstances, but is God's gift from His Spirit to believers. **Joy** is a part of God's very essence and as discussed below His Spirit manifests this supernatural joy in His children (Gal 5:22+, Acts 13:52+, 1 Th 1:6+). In sum, **Joy** is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who is filled with the Spirit and knows all is well between himself and the Lord. There is a chorus from an old spiritual song that is apropos...**Happiness happens But joy abides.**

**ILLUSTRATION** - A conference at a certain church in Omaha. People were given helium-filled balloons and told to release them at some point in the service when they felt like expressing the joy in their hearts. This church wasn't normally free to express themselves w/an "Hallelujah or a Praise the Lord." All through the service balloons ascended, but when it was over 1/3 of the balloons were unreleased. Let your balloon go!

**Has been made full** (complete) (4137) (**pleroo**) means to **be filled** (**passive voice** = saints acted on by outside force = "Divine Passive") to the brim (a net, Mt 13:48, a building, Jn 12:3, Acts 2:2, a city, Acts 5:28, needs Phil 4:19), to make complete in every particular, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally, to flood, to diffuse throughout, to pervade, to take possession of and so to ultimately to control. Pleroo in John - Jn. 3:29; Jn. 7:8; Jn. 12:3; Jn. 12:38; Jn. 13:18; Jn. 15:11; Jn. 15:25; Jn. 16:6; Jn. 16:24; Jn. 17:12; Jn. 17:13; Jn. 18:9; Jn. 18:32; Jn. 19:24; Jn. 19:36;

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**J C Ryle** - We have, in these verses, an instructive declaration of Christ's honour and dignity. John the Baptist teaches his disciples once more, the true greatness of the Person whose growing popularity offended them. Once more, and perhaps for the last time, he proclaims Him as one worthy of all honour and praise. He uses one striking expression after another, to convey a correct idea of the majesty of Christ. He speaks of Him as "the bridegroom" of the Church,—as "him that cometh from above,"—as "him whom God hath sent,"—as "him to whom the Spirit is given without measure,"—as Him "whom the Father loves," and into "whose hands all things are given,"—to believe in whom is life everlasting, and to reject whom is eternal ruin. Each of these phrases is full of deep meaning, and would supply matter for a long sermon. All show the depth and height of John's spiritual attainments. More honourable things are nowhere written concerning Jesus, than these verses recorded as spoken by John the Baptist. **Let us endeavour in life and death, to hold the same views of the Lord Jesus, to which John here gives expression. We can never make too much of Christ.** Our thoughts about the Church, the ministry, and the sacraments, may easily become too high and extravagant. We can never have too high thoughts about Christ, can never love Him too much, trust Him too implicitly, lay too much weight upon Him, and speak too highly in His praise. He is worthy of all the honour that we can give Him. He will be all in heaven. Let us see to it, that He is all in our hearts on earth.

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

NET John 3:30 He must become more important while I become less important."

GNT John 3:30 κε von δε αξ νειν, μ δ λαττο σθαι.

NLT John 3:30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

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

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

NIV John 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less.

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

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

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

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

YLT John 3:30 'Him it behoveth to increase, and me to become less;

NAB John 3:30 He must increase; I must decrease."

NJB John 3:30 He must grow greater, I must grow less.

GWN John 3:30 He must increase in importance, while I must decrease in importance.

BBE John 3:30 He has to become greater while I become less.

Amplified: He must increase, but I must decrease. [He must grow more prominent; I must grow less so.]

Cathers: The very nature of things demands that He and His ministry grow and that I become lesser in popularity.

CEV: Jesus must become more important, while I become less important

Wuest: It is necessary in the nature of the case for that One to become constantly greater but for me constantly to be made less.

- **must increase.** Ps 72:17-19. Is 9:7, 53:2, 3, 12. Da 2:34, 35, 44, 45. Mt 3:11. Mt 13:31-33. Lk 7:47. Rev 11:15.
- **but.** Ac 13:36, 37. 1 Co 3:5. 2 Co 3:7-11. Col 1:18. He 3:2-6.
- **decrease.** Ro 12:3. Php 2:3.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOHN THE BAPTIST'S SUMMUM BONUM!

- [Click for a more in depth commentary John 3:30](#)

**Summum Bonum** means the highest good. Pointing people to Christ was John's "highest good," and should be the goal of every disciple. But it may come with a cost. It cost John his life.

**He must increase** ([auxano](#) in [present tense](#)), **but I must decrease** ([elattoo](#) in [present tense](#)) - Two **musts** ([dei](#)), both in the [present tense](#), speaking of continual necessity. "**Must** speaks of divine necessity. It was God's will for John to give way to Jesus; there was no reason for the crowds to hang around the herald once the king had arrived. Because he understood this, John the Baptist joyously accepted God's plan for his ministry." (MacArthur)

**Bob Utley** says **must** "is a strong affirmation of John's understanding of himself as simply a forerunner of the greater and more significant ministry of Jesus." ([John 3](#))

**Ellicott** - The office of the [paranymph](#) ceases to exist when the marriage is accomplished. It must be so. So too in the interpretation. His own work was well-nigh done, but he is filled with the joy of having done his work, not with disappointment that it pales before the brightness of the work which is to follow. This is the text of the Forerunner's life. Well will it be for those followers of Christ whose lives shall be sermons on it! ([Ref](#))

**D A Carson** - In short, John says, He must become greater; I must become less. The 'must' ([dei](#)) is nothing less than the determined will of God. John finds his joy, not in grudgingly conceding victory to a superior opponent, but in wholeheartedly embracing God's will, and the supremacy it assigns to Jesus. A great deal of later Christian piety has turned on the same truth. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 212)

**Leon Morris** observes, "It is not particularly easy in this world to gather followers about one for a serious purpose. But when they are gathered it is infinitely harder to detach them and firmly insist that they go after another. It is the measure of John's greatness that he did just that" (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Barnes** - His authority and influence among the people must grow. his doctrine shall continue to spread until it extends through all the earth. I must decrease - "The purpose of my ministry is to point men to him. When that is done my work is done. I came not to form a party of my own, nor to set up a religion of my own; and my teaching must cease when he is fully established, as the light of the morning star fades away and is lost in the beams of the rising sun. This evinced John's humility and willingness to be esteemed as nothing if he could honor Christ. It shows us, also, that it is sufficient honor for man if he may be permitted to point sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ. No work is so honorable and joyful as the ministry of the gospel; none are so highly honored as those who are permitted to stand near the Son of God, lead perishing men to his cross. Compare Daniel 12:3+.

**Matthew Poole** - God hath indeed used me as a prophet, yea, more than a prophet, not to foretell Christ alone, but to point him to you. I have had my time, and finished my course, and God hath given me a reputation proportioned to the work he gave me to do, and to the time in which I was to work; but I must every day decay, and grow less and less, as Christ increaseth and groweth more and more.

**Bengel** - increase: be diminished - so that all are to come hereafter, not to me, but to Him: Joshua 4:14, "On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; so that they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life.."

Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but **One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals**; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. 19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, 20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. 21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." (Luke 3:15-22+)

**Steven Cole** comments - John the Baptist's life and ministry pointed people to Jesus Christ. As John 1:8 explains of John, "He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light." In our text, we see how John pointed people to Christ. It is significant that at the beginning of the passage, people are speculating about whether John himself might be the Christ. But by the end, where Luke reports Jesus' baptism, even though John was the one doing the baptizing, he isn't even mentioned! John has completely faded from view and, as with the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, we are left with Jesus alone and a voice from heaven confirming Him. Even so, if we want to be used by God to point people to the Savior, we must fade from view and leave the person with Jesus alone, along with the divine testimony, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." That God the Father is well-pleased with God the Son is at the foundation of the gospel message we are to proclaim.

#### **Pointing people to Christ requires exalting His supremacy over all.**

John the Baptist would later say about Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John was not jealously trying to promote himself and his ministry. He wanted people to look beyond him to Jesus alone. Even though in the flesh he could have tried to capitalize on the wave of popularity over his ministry, John humbled himself and exalted Jesus Christ. We must imitate his example in our witness to the lost. To do this ...

##### **A. We must humble ourselves.**

John tells people that his baptism is merely with water, but that Jesus' baptism is far more powerful, since it will be with the Holy Spirit and fire. More of this in a moment, but for now the point is that John humbled himself and pointed people to Christ. Also, John humbled himself by acknowledging that he was not even worthy to untie the thong of Jesus' sandals. This was viewed as such a degrading act that even Hebrew slaves were not required to do it.

If we want to point sinners to Jesus, we must humble ourselves so that they do not stumble over us. Sometimes we Christians come across to unbelievers as if we are not sinners. They usually smell the hypocrisy and turn away in disgust. We need to let lost people know that by nature, we are the same as they are. We are just beggars telling other beggars where they can find the Bread of Life.

##### **B. We must exalt Jesus Christ as supreme.**

Jesus is exalted here both by the witness of John and by the witness of God the Father at His baptism. We see that ...

- Jesus is supreme in the power and holiness of His person.

John confesses that Jesus is "mightier" than he is and that he is not worthy to untie Jesus' sandal thong. It is not an easy thing for a man to admit that another man is mightier than he is. But John knew that even though Jesus was younger than he was, Jesus existed before him (John 1:30) because Jesus is God in human flesh. By His power, He holds the very universe together (Col. 1:17). The miracles He performed bear witness to His power. Liberal scholars who explain away Jesus' miracles are not bearing witness to the Jesus of the Bible. He is Almighty God and nothing less!

By saying that he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandal thong, John was acknowledging the inherent holiness of Jesus' person. John was a godly man by human standards, but in his heart he knew that he wasn't even in the same league with Jesus. Jesus later could ask His critics, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). He repeatedly claimed that He was obedient to the Father's will and spoke only what the Father commanded (John 5:19, 30; 8:28, 29). As the sinless Son of God, only Jesus is worthy to bear our sins. We must lift Him up as the all-powerful and holy One.

- Jesus is supreme in the power and effects of His ministry.

When John contrasts his water baptism with Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit and fire, he is saying that Jesus does inwardly what John's ministry outwardly symbolizes. A person can go through the outward ritual of water baptism, but it is of no effect unless Jesus does a supernatural work in his heart through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

How should we interpret this baptism of the Spirit and fire? There are several views. There is only one preposition ("with," Greek, en) governing the two words (the NIV is incorrect in repeating "with"), so that it refers to one baptism. Thus it seems to me that this baptism must apply to one group, those who respond to the gospel. The Holy Spirit regenerates these people and progressively purges them from their sins by His purifying fire. The unquenchable fire of verse 17 refers to the eternal punishment of those who reject the gospel. Alexander Maclaren (Expositions of Holy Scripture [Baker], Luke, p. 76) explains it this way, "Either we shall gladly accept the purging fire of the Spirit which burns sin out of us, or we shall have to meet the punitive fire which burns up us and our sins together. To be cleansed by the one or to be consumed by the other is the choice before each of us."

The point is, Jesus is the Person who by His coming divides all humanity into two eternal camps. Either you repent of your sins and believe in Him, resulting in His giving you the Holy Spirit to empower you and purge sin out of your life. Or, you go on in your sins and die in them, facing the terrifying fire of eternal judgment.

- Jesus is supreme in the powerful affirmation of Him by the Father and by the Holy Spirit.

The way Luke presents Jesus' baptism minimizes John's role (he is not even mentioned) and even downplays the baptism itself. Rather Luke emphasizes that after the baptism, while Jesus was praying, heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and a voice came out of heaven affirming, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

The fact that Jesus would even submit to baptism signifies that at the outset of His ministry, He identified Himself with the sinners He came to save. Luke emphasizes Jesus' prayer life, which shows His dependence as the Son of Man on the Heavenly Father (there are seven references to Jesus praying in Luke: 3:21 [baptism]; 5:16 [growing fame]; 6:12 [choosing the 12]; 9:18 [just before Peter's confession]; 9:29 [Transfiguration]; 11:1 [before Lord's Prayer]; and, 22:41 [Gethsemane]).

The fact that heaven was opened shows that in Jesus, God was breaking into human history. The Holy Spirit's descent as a dove probably points to the gentleness and purity of the Spirit, and also shows the Holy Trinity united in the launching of Jesus' ministry. The affirmation of the Father from heaven relates to two Old Testament texts: Psalm 2:7, where the Father says of Messiah, "You are My Son"; and, Isaiah 42:1, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations." (Note the clear reference to the Trinity in this Old Testament passage!) The Father's being pleased with His beloved Son assures us that He is satisfied with His offering Himself on the cross for our sins. If we are in Christ, the Beloved, then we are accepted in the presence of the Holy God.

**When you bear witness, always bring people back to the exalted person and work of Jesus Christ. If they bring up objections or questions, answer them briefly if you must, but steer the conversation back to Jesus Christ. If we lift Him up, He will draw men to Himself** (John 12:32).

[\(Pointing People to Christ\)](#)

I often hear people paraphrase John's words in prayers praying "May I decrease, so Jesus might increase." While there is some truth to that prayer, the actual order is that He might increase, for when the Spirit enlightens the eyes of our heart to the glory and grandeur of the Messiah, we are overwhelmed by His presence and power and fall on our faces in worship and adoration. In short, we decrease! His increasing naturally (supernaturally) brings about our decreasing. And notice also that both His increase and our decrease are (1) an "must" (obligation, necessity, what must be or must happen) and (2) a continuing process, so that today and for the remainder of our days on earth He must be ever increasing and we must be ever decreasing and then (I would submit) throughout eternity He (the infinite One) will continually be increasing and we continually decreasing. Beloved, that is joy. That is glory to the max forever and ever. Amen.

**Lenski** - "He must grow," refers both to the office of Jesus and to his success in winning men. His work had only begun. "I must become less" likewise refers both to the office and the followers of the Baptist. Presently his task will be entirely done. (Borrow [The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel](#))

It's what the Rev. Richard Baxter (1615–1691) said on his deathbed, when someone was remembering the good which many had

received by his preaching and writings, Mr. Baxter replied, "I was but a pen in God's hand, and what praise is due to a pen?"

**John Phillips** - These are the last recorded words of this noble and valiant man before his arrest and imprisonment. Later he speaks once from prison. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Greg Ogden** on which disciples we should take time to disciple (we cannot disciple everyone!) - A disciple responds to the gracious call of Jesus Christ to follow him as Lord. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He must increase but I must decrease"(John 3:30 NRSV). We are seeking those who demonstrate a desire to place Jesus above all else in their lives. This is evidenced by a willingness to change in character and lifestyle, an openness to self-examination and a hunger to place themselves at Jesus' disposal in order to discover how their lives can count for him. (Discipleship Essentials)

**Steven Cole** - Under the glass on my desk I have this quote from [Robert Murray McCheyne](#): "I see a man cannot be a faithful minister, until he preaches Christ for Christ's sake-until he gives up striving to attract people to himself and seeks only to attract them to Christ." We always need to keep in mind that it's all about the bridegroom and not at all about the best man. "He must increase, but I must decrease."

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### **There are three "musts" in John 3.**

#### **1. The Must for the Sinner**

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

#### **2. The Must of the Savior**

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

#### **3. The Must of the Servant**

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

**Do you have a servant's attitude?** When you have this kind of attitude, you are not concerned about self-glory or getting the credit. You are concerned about helping others. Every young student knows of Isaac Newton's famed encounter with a falling apple. Newton discovered and introduced the laws of gravity in the 1600s, which revolutionized astronomical studies. But few know that if it weren't for Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned from Newton.

It was Halley who challenged Newton to think through his original notions. Halley corrected Newton's mathematical errors and prepared geometrical figures to support his discoveries. Halley coaxed the hesitant Newton to write his great work, *Mathematical Principals of Natural Philosophy*. Halley edited and supervised the publication, and actually financed its printing even though Newton was wealthier and easily could have afforded the printing costs. Historians call it one of the most selfless examples in the annals of science.

Newton began almost immediately to reap the rewards of prominence; Halley received little credit. He did use the principles to predict the orbit and return of the comet that would later bear his name, but only after his death did he received any acclaim. And because the comet only returns every seventy-six years, the notice is rather infrequent. Halley remained a devoted scientist who didn't care who received the credit as long as the cause was being advanced. Others have played Halley's role. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease." No wonder the Lord called him "the Greatest." God used John the Baptist because he had a servant's attitude. Do you? (Ron Mattoon)

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### **He Must Increase and I Must Decrease....**

1. Like a hungry baby screaming for its milk, like the flame that demands oxygen and fuel to nourish its flickering warmth, the Deity of Christ Demands that He must increase and I must decrease. He is God and God alone.

2. Like falling boulders from a cliff that are destined to hit the ground below, the Destiny of Men's Souls requires that He must increase, and I must decrease. Eternal life is found only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. As a roaring lion deserves our respect, Jesus Deserves to be glorified and praised. He must increase and I must decrease.

4. Like a new shirt that may be tainted with a small stain, a tiny tear, or a weakened button, the Defects in our Nature and Behavior cause us to be weak and fail. Our Lord, however, has no stains or flaws. This is why He must increase and I must decrease.

5. As our gaze is captured by the bony fingers of lightning that scratch their way across the black board of the night sky, Distractions created by us keep others from focusing on Him. This is why He must increase and I must decrease.

6. Like autumn leaves of gold, orange, and red that fall from their beds in majestic trees and die at the threshold of winter, Death will leave us nestled in the grave one day. We will be separated from our loved ones to no longer love and comfort them. This is why they need the peace and strength that come from a close walk with the Lord and why He must increase and I must decrease. (Ron



Mattoon)

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A Presbyterian pastor in Melbourne, Australia, introduced [J. Hudson Taylor](#) by using terms like "great or wonderful." Taylor stepped up to the pulpit and quietly said, "**Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.**" His attitude was the attitude of a servant. This was the same attitude that John the Baptist had and we are to have too. If John the Baptist in heaven heard that statement, he must have shouted "Hallelujah!"

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### **Keeping Yourself Out of Sight**

A little country boy was out fishing with only a switch for a pole and a bent pin for a hook, but he was catching many fish. A city fellow who had spent much time fishing without any success, though he had the best of fishing outfit, came across the boy with his long string of fish, and he asked the boy the reason of his success. The boy said, "The secret of it all is that I keep myself out of sight." We must keep ourselves out of sight if we desire to be a blessing to others.

John the Baptist kept himself out of sight. He said of the Lord. "He must increase, but I must decrease." He went before the Lord and paved the way for Him and then he stepped aside and let the Lord receive the glory. What a wonderful picture! —Junior Challenge

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### **John 3:30 He Must Increase**

Read: Galatians 2:17-21

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

Two little saplings grew side by side. Because of the action of the wind they continually crossed each other. In time the bark of each tree became wounded and the sap began to mingle, until one day they bonded together. As they grew, the stronger began to absorb the life of the weaker. One became larger and larger, while the top of the other began to wither and die. Now there are two trunks at the bottom and only one at the top. Death has taken away the one; life has triumphed in the other.

There was a time when you and Jesus Christ met and your heart was joined to His. Where are you now? Are your two lives running parallel, or does your life show more of Christ and less and less of your old sinful self? Do people see more and more Christlike character and less of you?

Can you say, in the words of the apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"? (Gal. 2:20).

Our goal must be the same as that of John the Baptist, who said when he met Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30). By M.R. De Haan

Higher than the highest heavens,  
Deeper than the deepest sea,  
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered;  
None of self and all of Thee.  
—Monod

The more we serve Christ, the less we will serve self.

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**THE POINTER** - In his classic work [The Master's Indwelling](#), Andrew Murray illustrated this problem of being distracted. He wrote, "When a man is giving a lecture, he often uses a long pointer to indicate places on a map or a chart. Do people look at that pointer? No, that only helps to show them the place on the map, and they do not think of it. It might even be of fine gold, but the pointer cannot satisfy them. They want to see what the pointer points at. And the Bible is a pointer, pointing us to God."

John the Baptist was just the pointer.  
Jesus was Who he was pointing to.

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**William Carey** - When Alexander Duff was home on furlough from India in 1834, he often visited missionary statesman William Carey. On his last visit before Carey died, Duff spent much of his time talking about Carey's work. Finally, Carey seemed to tire of it and whispered, "Pray." After Duff prayed, he arose to leave the room, but Carey called him to return to his side. "Mr. Duff," he said graciously, "you have been speaking about Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey. When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak about Dr. Carey's Savior."

May we too call attention to Jesus,  
the One whom God has highly exalted. His is the name to remember.

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**BEETHOVEN IS EVERYTHING** - After a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the audience gave conductor [Arturo Toscanini](#) and the Orchestra a prolonged ovation. Toscanini, filled with emotion, turned to his musicians and whispered, "I am nothing, you are nothing." Then, in almost adoring tones, Toscanini said, "But Beethoven is everything!" Likewise, we must recognize that Jesus is everything! B. When Jealousy knocks on your door do you open it? - How do you handle it?

Likewise, we must recognize that  
Jesus is everything

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- [Click for a more in depth commentary John 3:30](#)

**John 3:31 "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.**

NET John 3:31 The one who comes from above is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is superior to all.

GNT John 3:31 νωθεν ρχ μενος π νω π ντων στ ν· ν κ τ ς γ ς κ τ ς γ ς σ τ ι ν κ α κ τ ς γ ς λ α λ ε . κ τ ο ο ρ α ν ο ρ χ μενος [ π νω π ντων στ ν·]

NLT John 3:31 "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else.

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

ESV John 3:31 He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.

NIV John 3:31 "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.

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

CSB John 3:31 The One who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The One who comes from heaven is above all.

NKJ John 3:31 "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.

NRS John 3:31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all.

YLT John 3:31 he who from above is coming is above all; he who is from the earth, from the earth he is, and from the earth he speaketh; he who from the heaven is coming is above all.

NAB John 3:31 The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven (is above all).

NJB John 3:31 He who comes from above is above all others; he who is of the earth is earthly himself and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven

GWN John 3:31 "The person who comes from above is superior to everyone. I, a person from the earth, know nothing but what is on earth, and that's all I can talk about. The person who comes from heaven is superior to everyone

BBE John 3:31 He who comes from heaven is greater than all others: he who comes from earth is of the earth, and of the earth are his words: he who comes from heaven is over all.

- **He who comes** Jn 3:13. Jn 6:33. 8:23, 24. 1 Co 2:8. 15:47. Ep 1:20, 21. 4:8-10. Php 2:6. Ja 2:1.
- **is above all.** Jn 3:35. Jn 1:15, 27, 30. \*5:21-25. Ne 9:6. Ps 97:9. Mt 28:18. Ac 10:36. Ro 9:5. 1 Co 1:30. 12:3. Ep 1:21. Php 2:9-11. 1 Pe 3:22. Re 19:16.
- **he that is.** Jn 3:12. Mt 16:23. 1 Co 15:47, 48. He 9:1, 9, 10.

- **and speaks.** 1 Jn 4:5.
- **earth.** Jdg 11:40.
- **he who comes** Jn 3:13. Jn 6:33, 51. 16:27, 28.
- **above all.** Jn 1:15. Ps 89:27. Ac 10:36. 1 Co 2:8. 15:47. Col 1:15, 18. Heb 1:4-6. Rev 1:5. 3:14.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Similar Passages:

John 3:13 "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

John 6:33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

John 8:23 And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.

John 16:27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.

## HEAVENLY ORIGIN VERSUS EARTHLY ORIGIN

Some argue that John is no longer speaking in this section (D A Carson), but there is no clear indication of a break in the flow of the argument, so these words could certainly be those of the Baptist (John MacArthur).

**Bob Utley** - There has been much discussion among commentators over whether these verses are (1) John the Baptist's continuing verbal affirmations; or (2) the words of Jesus (cf. 3:11–12); or (3) of John the Apostle. These verses return to the themes of vv. 16–21." ([John 3](#))

John the Baptist has just stated Jesus must increase (Jn 3:30) and now he explains why this must be so, emphasizing first His superior origin from Heaven. Stated another way here is the reason why He must increase while all human teachers must decrease.

**He who comes from above (anothen) is above (epanos) all** - NLT has "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else." (Jn 3:13+). No one, however exalted a prophet, can rival Him. John is referring of course to Jesus "Who descended from heaven." **Comes** is in the [present tense](#) signifying "The coming regarded as still in process of manifestation." (Vincent) **From above** is the adverb [anothen](#) which is translated **again** in the phrase **born again** (or "born from above") in Jn 3:3 and Jn 3:7 and in those two passages clearly describes the heavenly origin of the new birth. In the same way John says Christ comes **from above** or from heaven (cf Jn 3:13; Jn 6:33, 38, 50–51, 58; Jn 8:42; Jn 13:3; Jn 16:28; Jn 17:8; 1 Cor. 15:47; Eph. 4:10). Note **above all** signifies that Jesus is not just **above** John the Baptist but **ALL** men in general.

Notice below the words for **above** are different, the first (anothen) alluding to Jesus' pre-existence and deity in coming from Heaven (above [anothen](#)) and the second ([epanos](#)) speaks of the fact that Christ is over all creation ([listen to the song below](#)).

*The heavenly origin of Jesus makes him supreme over all men,  
who are wholly of earthly origin.*

--- R C H Lenski

(Borrow [The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel](#))

**Utley** has an interesting comment - "**He who comes from above**" It is significant that the two titles used for the Messiah emphasize His pre-existence and full deity (cf. Jn 3:31), and His incarnation and God-given mission (cf. Jn 3:34). The term "from above" ([anothen](#)) is the same term used in the phrase "born again" or "born from above" in Jn 3:3. ([John 3](#))

Paul reiterates this truth after describing Christ emptying, taking the form of a bondservant and dying on the Cross...

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him **the name which is above every name** 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Php 2:9-11+)

**Ron Mattoon** - In a day where people tend to worship rock stars, movie stars, and athletes, whose fame is fickle and fleeting, the Bible tells us that Christ is above all for eternity. No name compares to Jesus. His name will out live Washington, Lincoln, Napoleon, Caesar, Einstein, Mozart, or Beethoven. Kings will bow to Him for He is King of all kings, and Lord of all lords.

[Barnes](#) - It has been doubted whether the remainder of this chapter contains the words of "John the Baptist" or of "the evangelist."

The former is the more probable opinion, but it is difficult to decide it, and it is of very little consequence....**Is above all** - In nature, rank, and authority. "Is superior to all prophets" Hebrews 1:1-2; "to all angels" Hebrews 1:4-14, "and is over all the universe as its sovereign Lord," Ro 9:5; Eph 1:21-22; Col 1:15-19; 1 Cor 15:25.

**Craig Evans** - Just as Nicodemus must be born "from above" ([another](#) Jn 3:3), so now John the Baptist becomes a witness to Jesus as one who is "from above" ([another](#) Jn 3:31) Jesus has descended from heaven (Jn 3:12-13) bringing heavenly gifts of Spirit and rebirth—he is a messenger who reveals what he has seen and heard in heaven's precincts (Jn 3:31-32). Just as Nicodemus represents Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, so now, John the Baptist is a Jewish prophet. Both men are from "the earth" while Jesus is "from above." Acts 19:1-7 mentions followers of John the Baptist living in Ephesus who did not believe in Jesus. Later post-apostolic evidence even suggests that such communities continued to exist a few generations later. They were communities which elevated John the Baptist and rejected Jesus' messiahship. If such a polemic existed in the communities that would read the Fourth Gospel, John 3:22-36 becomes a potent corrective. John the Baptist becomes a premier witness to Jesus dispelling rumors of a rivalry with Jesus and urging his followers to believe in him. The Baptist devalues his own status—as the friend (3:29) compared with the bridegroom—and says explicitly that "he must become greater; I must become less" (Jn 3:30). (The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary)

**He who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth- NLT** = We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things." Note **the earth** is repeated 3x (contrasting with **above** repeated 3x) emphasizing the limitations of earthly messengers when compared to the Heavenly Messenger of the Covenant from above (cf Mal 3:1+). With this repetition of **the earth** John refers to himself and ultimately of all mankind for "the **LORD God formed man of dust from the ground**, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" and "by the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For **you are dust, And to dust you shall return.**" (Ge 2:7, 3:19) The contrast of course is man as the creature with human limitations versus Jesus Who as "the Word (GOD) became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1:14+).

Paul amplifies this truth of God's earthly messengers declaring that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." (2 Cor 4:7±)

The apostle John later contrasts the earthly John the Baptist with the heavenly Christ declaring that the Baptist "was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me." (Jn 5:35-36+).

**Bob Utley** on John the Baptist being **of the earth from the earth** - This is not a negative statement about John. The term for earth here (gē, 12:32; 17:4; 1 John 5:8 but 76 times in Revelation) is not the same as the term "world" (kosmos) which is often used negatively by John. This is simply an affirmation that Jesus spoke out of that which He knows, heaven, while all human beings speak out of that which they know, earth. Therefore, the testimony of Jesus is far greater than that of any earthly prophet or preacher. ([John 3](#))

**John Phillips** writes that "The prophets of the Old Testament—men like Moses and Malachi, David and Daniel, Jonah and Jeremiah—were "of the earth." They had human limitations." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Barnes** - He who has no higher nature than the human nature. The prophets, apostles, and John were men like others, born in the same way, and sinking, like others, to the dust. See Acts 14:15. Jesus had a nature superior to man, and "ought," therefore, to be exalted above all. **Is earthly** - Is human. Is inferior to him who comes from heaven. Partakes of his origin, which is inferior and corrupt. **Speaks of the earth** - His teaching is inferior to that of him who comes from heaven. It is comparatively obscure and imperfect, not full and clear, like the teaching of him who is from above. This was the case with all the prophets; and even with John the Baptist, as compared with the teaching of Christ.

**He who comes from heaven is above all- NLT** = "but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else." This reiterates John's declaration in John 1:15+ when he "testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" And in John 1:27+ John declared "He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (Mt 3:11+, Mk 1:7+, Lk 3:16+).

**Robertson** on **from heaven** - this use of [\[ek\]](#) (= FROM) for origin and source of character as in Jn 1:46+ ("come out of [\[ek\]](#) Nazareth"); 1 John 4:5± ("from [\[ek\]](#) the world" - twice). Jesus is the one that comes out of heaven (ho [ek](#) tou ouranou erchomenos) as He has shown in Jn 1:1-18+. Hence he is "above all."

**John Phillips** explains that "The Lord Jesus was free from the limitations felt by ordinary human messengers. He was from heaven. He had full knowledge of heavenly things, of the eternal counsels of God. Thus we read in that grand opening statement of Hebrews: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last

days spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). It is like the difference between speaking to an audience through an interpreter and speaking to them in their own language." (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Ron Mattoon** - No matter what the circumstance, Christ's preeminence and supremacy always came to the surface from His birth all the way to His death and resurrection. He was born in the meanest of circumstances, yet the air above was filled with the hallelujahs of a heavenly host. Even though His lodging was a cattle pen, a star drew distinguished visitors from afar to honor and worship Him. Why? He is above all!

**Growing up, His relatives were inconspicuous and uninfluential.** Yet, in infancy, He startled a king. In boyhood, Jesus puzzled the doctors. In His manhood, Christ the Creator, ruled the elements of nature, defying the laws of gravity by walking upon the water and then calming a raging sea. Multitudes were healed without medicine by the Lord. Funeral processions were halted as the Lord raised the dead. Huge crowds were fed with small portions of food that He miraculously multiplied. How did the Lord do these things? He is above all!

**Jesus never wrote a book, yet, all the libraries of the world could not hold the books that have been written about Him.** He never wrote a song, yet He has furnished the theme of more songs than all song writers combined. Our Lord never founded a college, yet all schools together cannot boast of as many students as He has following Him. Jesus never practiced medicine but He has healed more broken hearts and lives than doctors have healed broken bodies. How can all of this be? He is above all!

**Our Lord never marshaled an army, drafted a soldier, or fired a gun,** yet, no leader ever had more volunteers who have under His orders made rebels stack arms or surrender without a shot being fired. Great men have come and gone, but Jesus lives on. Herod could not kill Him; Satan could not seduce Him; the demons of Hell obeyed Him. Why? He is above all.

**Jesus had nothing He could call His own.** He was born in a borrowed stable, rode on a borrowed beast, preached on another's boat, He was nailed to another's cross, and buried in a borrowed tomb. The crucifixion of Jesus was the crime of crimes. The Innocent One died for the guilty. When Christ died on the cross, few men mourned, yet, in the heavens, a black crepe was hung over the sun. Men did not tremble for their sins, but the earth shook under the burden of Calvary. All of nature honored Him, but sinners rejected Him. Why? He is above all.

People want to cheer for the winning team and be on the winning side. If that is your desire, then follow Christ. He is number one for all eternity. Some may say, "It doesn't seem like the Lord is winning." My answer is "Wait and see what happens in the ninth inning of the last days." Christ will take His rightful place and rule this world from the city of Jerusalem with a rod of iron. All prophecies of Scripture will finally be fulfilled because He is above all.

A big deal is made about UFO's and close encounters with aliens from other worlds. Mankind has had a close encounter with the Son of God. Jesus came from above to walk among us here and do God's will. (Mattoon's Treasures)

### **Above All**

Above all powers

Above all kings

Above all nature and all created things

Above all wisdom and all the ways of man

You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms

Above all thrones

Above all wonders the world has ever known

Above all wealth and treasures of the earth

There's no way to measure what you're worth

Crucified

Laid behind the stone

You lived to die

Rejected and alone

Like a rose trampled on the ground

You took the fall

And thought of me

Above all

Above all powers

Above all kings

Above all nature and all created things

Above all wisdom and all the ways of man

You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms

Above all thrones

Above all wonders the world has ever known

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Above all

Like a rose trampled on the ground

You took the fall

And thought of me

Above all

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**From above** (509)(**anōthen** from **ano** = above, upward, up + **suffix** "-then" = from) literally means from above with a secondary meaning of again. **Anōthen** can speak of place or time.

**Above** (1883)(**epanos**) marker of a position relatively higher whether contiguous or not, as an adverb; (1) of place above, over (Lk11.44); (2) with numbers more than, exceeding something in amount and so more than (1Cor 15.6, Mk 14:5); (3) as an improper preposition with the genitive meaning superior in status and thus over, above, on (Mt 2:9; Mt 5:14 (on top of a hill); Mt 23:18, 20,22; Lk 19:17, 19; Jn 3:31; Rev 20:3)

NT -above(3), more than(1), over(7). Matt. 2:9; Matt. 27:37; Mk. 14:5; Lk. 4:39; Lk. 11:44; Lk. 19:17; Lk. 19:19; Jn. 3:31; 1 Co. 15:6; Rev. 20:3

Septuagint - Gen. 1:2; Gen. 1:7; Gen. 1:29; Gen. 7:18; Gen. 7:20; Gen. 18:2; Gen. 22:9; Gen. 40:17; Gen. 42:27; Exod. 30:14; Exod. 38:26; Lev. 27:7; Num. 1:3; Num. 1:18; Num. 1:20; Num. 1:22; Num. 1:24; Num. 1:26; Num. 1:28; Num. 1:30; Num. 1:32; Num. 1:34; Num. 1:36; Num. 1:38; Num. 1:40; Num. 1:42; Num. 1:45; Num. 3:15; Num. 3:22; Num. 3:28; Num. 3:34; Num. 3:39; Num. 3:40; Num. 3:43; Num. 4:3; Num. 4:23; Num. 4:30; Num. 4:35; Num. 4:39; Num. 4:43; Num. 4:47; Num. 8:24; Num. 14:29; Num. 26:2; Num. 26:4; Num. 26:62; Num. 32:11; Deut. 28:13; Jos. 9:5; Jdg. 1:14; Jdg. 1:36; Jdg. 13:20; Ruth 3:15; 1 Sam. 9:2; 1 Sam. 10:23; 1 Sam. 16:13; 1 Sam. 17:6; 1 Sam. 17:39; 1 Sam. 30:25; 2 Sam. 1:9; 2 Sam. 5:20; 2 Sam. 24:20; 2 Sam. 24:21; 1 Ki. 2:35; 2 Ki. 3:21; 2 Ki. 15:35; 1 Chr. 23:3; 1 Chr. 23:24; 1 Chr. 23:27; 2 Chr. 4:13; 2 Chr. 6:6; 2 Chr. 24:20; 2 Chr. 25:5; 2 Chr. 26:19; 2 Chr. 31:16; 2 Chr. 31:17; Ezr. 3:8; Neh. 8:5; Neh. 12:31; Neh. 12:38; Job 33:12; Ps. 108:4; Eccl. 5:8; Isa. 10:9; Isa. 14:13; Isa. 14:14; Isa. 18:2; Jer. 16:16; Jer. 35:4; Jer. 36:10; Jer. 43:10; Jer. 52:32; Ezek. 1:11; Ezek. 1:27; Ezek.

**Napoleon Bonaparte on the supremacy of Christ** He was discussing Christ with [Henri Bertrand](#), an officer who faithfully accompanied him into exile but did not believe in the deity of Jesus. The former emperor of France gave this witness: "I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ was not a mere man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Him and the founders of empires and the gods of their religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and the forms of pagan worship the distance of infinity. Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and His will confounds me. He commands us to believe and gives no reason besides His own inspiring claim, 'I am God.' Between Him and others in this world there is no possible comparison. He is truly a Being by himself. His sentiments, the truths which He announced, and His manner of life are unexplainable. Philosophers who try to solve the mysteries of the universe by their empty dissertations are fools! Christ... speaks with authority. The closer I come, the more carefully I examine Him; everything is above me and has a grandeur which overpowers.... I search in vain in history to find one similar to Jesus or anything which can approach the Gospel He preached. Everything about Him is extraordinary!"

**John 3:32 "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony."**

NET John 3:32 He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.

GNT John 3:32 ρακεν κα κουσεν το το μαρτυρε , κα τ ν μαρτυρ αν α το ο δε ς λαμβ νει.

NLT John 3:32 He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them!

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

ESV John 3:32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

NIV John 3:32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.

ASV John 3:32 What he hath seen and heard, of that he beareth witness; and no man receiveth his witness.

CSB John 3:32 He testifies to what He has seen and heard, yet no one accepts His testimony.

NKJ John 3:32 "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

NRS John 3:32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony.

YLT John 3:32 'And what he hath seen and heard this he doth testify, and his testimony none receiveth;

NAB John 3:32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.

NJB John 3:32 bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, but his testimony is not accepted by anybody;

GWN John 3:32 and tells what he has seen and heard. Yet, no one accepts what he says.

BBE John 3:32 He gives witness of what he has seen and of what has come to his ears; and no man takes his witness as true.

- **what.** Jn 3 11. Jn 1:18. Jn 5:20. Jn 7:16. Jn 8:26, 28, 38, 40. Jn 12:49. Jn 14:24. Jn 15:15. Jn 18:37. Re 1:5.
- **no one receives His testimony.** Ex 20:10, 11, 19, 26, 33. Jn 1:11. 5:43. 12:37. Is 50:2. 53:1. Ro 10:16-21. 11:2-6
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Similar Passages:**

John 3:11 "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

John 8:26; "I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world."

John 15:15 "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

## JESUS' TESTIMONY DISBELIEVED

**What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies** (See John 1:18; Jn 3:11, 13, 31; Jn 8:40; 15:15) - **What He has seen** refers to what Jesus saw in Heaven before His incarnation. **Has seen** is in the [perfect tense](#) which speaks of this an abiding truth. Some witnesses give testimony based on what they have seen, others based on what they have heard. Jesus is the impeccable witness for what He testifies is based on both sight and sound! It follows that when **He testifies**, He does so from first hand knowledge. His witness can be trusted implicitly! Note that it is also very reasonable to say that some things Jesus saw while in Heaven, but other things He received by His continual fellowship with the Father while He was on earth. **Godet** writes that "the forerunner declares that Jesus has affirmed nothing respecting Himself which is not the exact truth." **Morris** adds "The teaching of the Master is not a hypothesis put forward as a basis for discussion. He teaches what he knows." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Bengel** says **He testifies** ([martureo](#)) "is much more weighty than He speaks ([laleo](#) in Jn 3:31)."

**Utley** - Jesus is God's ultimate revelation (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:13-20<sup>±</sup>; Heb. 1:1-3<sup>±</sup>). He speaks out of (1) His personal experience with God the Father, and (2) His own deity. ([John 3](#))

**Matthew Poole** - Another great difference which the Baptist teaches his disciples to put between his testimony and Christ's, is, that he, and so all other ministers of the Gospel, testify by revelation; Christ testifies not by revelation, but from his own personal knowledge, what himself hath seen and heard from his Father.

**Testifies** ([present tense](#) - continually) (3140) see note on [martureo](#) which is a key word in John used far more often than all the synoptic Gospels combined (3x) - Jn. 1:7; Jn. 1:8; Jn. 1:15; Jn. 1:32; Jn. 1:34; Jn. 2:25; Jn. 3:11; Jn. 3:26; Jn. 3:28; Jn. 3:32; Jn. 4:39; Jn. 4:44; Jn. 5:31; Jn. 5:32; Jn. 5:33; Jn. 5:36; Jn. 5:37; Jn. 5:39; Jn. 7:7; Jn. 8:13; Jn. 8:14; Jn. 8:18; Jn. 10:25; Jn. 12:17; Jn. 13:21; Jn. 15:26; Jn. 15:27; Jn. 18:23; Jn. 18:37; Jn. 19:35; Jn. 21:24

**Phillips** says "What an astonishing fact. It was not just a spirit-inspired prophet, not even an angel from the presence of God, but God himself who came. And people actually disbelieved him-and still do...When we hear him talking about marriage in terms of Adam and Eve and the garden of Eden, he was there. It was something he had seen and heard. When he spoke of Noah, the ark, and the flood, it is the same. It was something he had seen and heard. When he talked about Abraham or Noah or Isaiah or David or Daniel, these were people he had seen and heard. When he talked about the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was there. He had seen and heard. Far more than Lot, whom he knew, his righteous soul was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Peter 2:7-8). When he talked about "that great gulf fixed" and described the torment of a soul in hell, he had seen and heard. When he spoke of his Father's house of many mansions he was talking about things he had seen and heard. When he unveiled the future, talked about building a church, talked about the endtime rebirth of the state of Israel, talked about the desecration of a future temple and about a coming great tribulation, he was talking as one who had stood outside our space-time dimensional limitations in an unwavering present tense and had seen and heard. He was speaking as one "from above." "And no man receiveth his testimony," says John. Truth incarnate had spoken and his word was actually disbelieved." (Borrow [Exploring John](#), 80)

**And no one receives His testimony** - This phrase counters John's disciples who had said '**all are coming to Him**.' (Jn 3:26) **No one receives** in this context means **no one** accepts Jesus' **testimony**. In other words they refuse to trust it. Clearly this statement does not signify that absolutely **no one** believed Jesus' testimony, for in Jn 3:33 some **received His testimony**. The **NLT** is a reasonably good paraphrase here = "how few believe what He tells them!" This is a sad passage indicating how few received what Jesus taught!

**Jamieson** - John's disciples had said, "All come to Him" (Jn 3:26). The Baptist here virtually says, Would it were so, but alas! they are next to "none" [Bengel]. They were far readier to receive himself, and obliged him to say, I am not the Christ, and he seems pained at this.

**MacArthur** - the Baptist's hyperbolic statement ("NO ONE") emphasized that the world in general rejects Jesus and His teaching. (See [John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Robertson** - There were crowds coming to Jesus, but they do not really accept him as Saviour and Lord (1:11; 2:24). It is superficial as time will show. But "no one" is not to be pressed too far, for it is the rhetorical use.

**Ramsey** - Jesus' testimony is not accepted by the world—this despite the impression that "they are all coming to him" (Jn 3:26). John's disciples could not have been more mistaken, for Jesus himself had told Nicodemus, "You people do not **receive** our testimony" (Jn 3:11), and John now generalizes from this that "no one receives his testimony." Both pronouncements confirm the grim verdict that "his own did not receive him" (Jn 1:11), and that "human beings loved the dark and not the Light, because their works were evil" (Jn 3:19). (Borrow [The](#)



[Gospel of John](#))

**Leon Morris** - "No one" is not to be taken literally, as the very next verse shows. The passage is reminiscent of 1:11–12, where a statement that might be understood to mean that nobody at all received Jesus is immediately explained. John has already made it clear in this chapter that we must all be reborn. In our natural condition we will not accept Christ's witness. The world, as a whole, is not interested in the truth that Jesus came to bring. John sorrowfully makes it plain that people do not receive his witness. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**D A Carson** - John pessimistically evaluates the reception of the one from above: **no-one** accepts his testimony. In this he is merely repeating the evaluation of Jesus himself (Jn 3:11+ = "you do not accept our testimony") (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Barton** - This is a great condemnation upon mankind—especially the people who lived when Jesus did, for they were the ones who heard his testimony and rejected it (see Jn 1:10–11; 3:11; 12:37ff.). (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow))

Sadly, several times in his gospel John recorded the relative resistance to reception of Jesus' testimony by the Jews...

"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not **receive** ([paralambano](#)) Him. But as many as **received** ([lambano](#)) Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." (Jn 1:11-12+)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not **accept** ([lambano](#)) our testimony. (Jn 3:11+)

"I have come in My Father's name, and **you do not receive** ([lambano](#)) Me; if another comes in his own name, **you will receive** ([lambano](#)) him. (Jn 5:43+)

But though He had performed so many signs before them, **yet they were not believing in Him.** (Jn 12:37)

**Receives** ([2983](#)) see note on [lambano](#). Here in the present tense, active voice as taking to oneself someone's words, teaching, or testimony receive, accept, to accept as true, come to believe (Jn 12:48, Jn 17:8, Mt 13:20), but sadly in this modified by **no one!**

**Vincent - Lambano** "also includes the retaining of what is taken. Hence of receiving Christ (1:12; 5:43; 13:20). The phrase receive the witness is peculiar to John (Jn 3:11; 5:34; 1 John 5:9)."

**Bengel** on Lambano in John 3:32 - A form of faith. There must be a receiving, not a mere bodily coming.

**Testimony** ([3141](#)) ([marturia/martyria](#) related to [martureo](#) = to witness <> [martus/martys](#) = a witness) is that which furnishes evidence or proof. **Marturia** can be the witness per se. A witness is one who has first hand knowledge and so the purpose of John the Baptist was to bear witness of Messiah (the Light) so that all might believe through Him (Jn 1:7). **Marturia** in other contexts can refer to the content of what the witness speaks - testimony, evidence (Mk 14:55). In 1Ti 3:7 the sense of **marturia** is that of one's reputation (think of it as the "witness" of their life and their character before others). A witness does not speak on his own behalf, though he may share his own experience, but primarily the purpose of the witness is to tell about another. **Marturia** and the verb **martureo** are predominantly Johannine words - **Witness** is also one of the major themes of John's Gospel. **Martureo** occurs 33 times (cp 1x in Matthew, 1x in Luke, none in Mark) and the noun **marturia** 14 times (0 in Mt, 1x in Luke, 3x in Mark).

**John 3:33 "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.**

NET John 3:33 The one who has accepted his testimony has confirmed clearly that God is truthful.

GNT John 3:33 λαβ ν α το τ ν μαρτυρ αν σφρ γισεν τι θε ς ληθ ς σπιν.

NLT John 3:33 Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true.

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

ESV John 3:33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

NIV John 3:33 The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.

ASV John 3:33 He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true.

CSB John 3:33 The one who has accepted His testimony has affirmed that God is true.

NKJ John 3:33 "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.

NRS John 3:33 Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true.

YLT John 3:33 he who is receiving his testimony did seal that God is true;

NAB John 3:33 Whoever does accept his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy.

NJB John 3:33 though anyone who does accept his testimony is attesting that God is true,

GWN John 3:33 I have accepted what that person said, and I have affirmed that God is truthful.

BBE John 3:33 He who so takes his witness has made clear his faith that God is true.

- **has set.** Jn 6:27. Ro 3:3, 4. 4:11, 18-21. 2 Co 1:18. Ti 1:1, 2. He 6:17, 18. 1 Jn 5:9, 10.
- **seal.** Neh 9:38. Ro 4:11. 15:28. 1 Co 9:2. 2 Co 1:22. Ep 1:13. 4:30. 2 Ti 2:19. Re 7:3-8.
- **God is true.** Jn 8:26. Ro 3:4. 1 Jn 5:10.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Similar passages:

John 6:27+ "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

1 John 5:9-10+ If we receive the **testimony** of men, the **testimony** of God is greater; for the **testimony** of God is this, that He has **testified** concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the **testimony** in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the **testimony** that God has given concerning His Son.

### JESUS' TESTIMONY: TRUE AND DEPENDABLE

**Dependable** = [reliable](#), [sure](#), [responsible](#), [steady](#), [faithful](#), [reputable](#), [trustworthy](#), [unfailing](#)

**He who has received** ([lambano](#)) **His testimony** ([marturia/martyria](#)) - Even as Jesus' negative reception in John 1:11+ was followed by the positive reception in Jn 1:12+, we see in this passage the antithesis of Jn 3:32 where **no one receives His testimony** (i.e., the majority who hear Jesus will reject His testimony). So here we see that some **received** or accepted Jesus' testimony and believed that He was the Son of God Who had come from Heaven as Israel's long awaited Messiah and in so doing were recipients of **eternal life** (Jn 3:16). In a similar way John 3:19-20 says some loved the darkness and hated the light, others came to the light (Jn 3:21).

[Barnes](#) on **He who has received** - **Has received** and fully believed his doctrine. Hath yielded his heart to its influence.

**Utley** notes that **He who has received** is "an [AORIST](#) PARTICIPLE while Jn 3:36 (believes) is a [PRESENT](#) PARTICIPLE. This shows that trusting in God for salvation is not only an initial decision (**ED**: aorist = at a point in time in past) but it is also a life of discipleship (**ED**: present tense = lifestyle, habitual practice). This same affirmation of the need for acceptance has been previously stated both in Jn 1:12+ (received = [aorist](#) and believes = [present](#)) and Jn 3:16–18. Notice the dichotomy between accepting the testimony (v. 33) and continuing to walk in it (v. 36). ([John 3](#))

**J Ramsey Michaels** writes that "Most interpreters conclude that it refers to anyone, anywhere, who ever "received" Jesus or "believed in his name" (as in 1:12), and that it functions as a kind of invitation to the reader to do exactly that. Yet the aorist participle with the definite article (ho labōn) suggests a more specific reference, possibly to John himself, who has just acknowledged "receiving" only what heaven had to give (John 3:27), and who "received" from Jesus "fullness" and "grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16). The two options are not mutually exclusive, for John is, as we have seen (Jn 1:15–16, 20, 34+), the first among many believers in Jesus in a Gospel that has come (whether by chance or design) to bear his name." (Borrow [The Gospel of John](#))

[Ellicott](#) - Earlier disciples, as Andrew and John (John 1:40), had passed from the Forerunner to the Great Teacher, and had heard in His words that which went to the divine in their own spirits, and had come from the short first meeting with the conviction, "We

have found the Messias.”

**Leon Morris** - Those who accept Christ are not merely entering into a relationship with a fellow human being (as they would be doing, for example, if they attached themselves to John the Baptist). They are accepting what God has said. They are recognizing the heavenly origin of Jesus. They are acknowledging the truth of God's revelation in Christ. They are proclaiming to all their deep conviction that God is true. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Has set his seal to this, that God is true- His'** is emphatic, balancing 'God.' 'He that received Christ's witness, set his seal that God is true.' To believe the Messiah is to believe God, for the Messiah is God's interpreter, John 1:18+. "A **seal** was used to secure (Mt 27:66), conceal (Rev 22:10), and authenticate (John 6:27); here the last meaning is in view. Observe that the believer affirms the truthfulness of God, since the Son bears witness to what God has given him to say." (Beasley-Murray)

The metaphor **seal** is from sealing a document to express one's trust in it and adherence to it. The seal certifies and thus attests the validity of the document (shown by the seal on it) and here speaks of attesting the truthfulness of Jesus (and **His testimony**) as true and God as true. Another way one might look at this is those who believe Jesus' **testimony** that He is the Son of God set their seal of approval on the Father's testimony Who declared " "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."(Luke 3:22, Mt 17:5).

[Robertson](#) says "The one who accepts the witness of Jesus attests that Jesus speaks the message of God."

[Barnes](#) - To "**seal**" an instrument is to make it sure; to acknowledge it as ours; to pledge our veracity that it is true and binding, as when a man seals a bond, a deed, or a will. Believing a doctrine, therefore, in the heart, is expressed by "sealing it," or by believing it we express our firm conviction that it is true, and that **God** Who has spoken it is **true**. We vouch for the veracity of **God**, and assume as our own the proposition that it is the truth of **God**.

We learn here:

1. that to be a true believer is something more than to hold a mere speculative belief of the truth. **ED**: to profess but not possess - Titus 1:16).
2. that to be a believer is to "pledge ourselves" for the truth, to seal it as our own, to adopt it, to choose it, and solemnly assent to it, as a man does in regard to an instrument of writing that is to convey his property, or that is to dispose of it when he dies.
3. Every Christian is a witness for God, and it is his business to show by his life that he believes that God is true to his threatenings and to his promises. See the notes at Isaiah 43:10.
4. It is a solemn act to become a Christian. It is a surrender of all to God, or giving away body, soul, and spirit to him, with a belief that he is true, and alone is able to save.
5. The man that does not do this - that is not willing to pledge his belief that God is true, sets to his seal that God is a liar and unworthy of confidence, 1 John 5:10.

**MacArthur** explains it this way - In the ancient world, people set their seal to something (often with a signet ring; Gen. 41:42; Est. 3:10, 12; 8:2, 8, 10; Dan. 6:17) as a sign of complete acceptance and approval. In today's jargon, they signed off on it. Those who have received Christ's testimony thereby certify their belief that God is true when He speaks through His Son, as always (cf. John 17:17; Ro 3:4; Titus 1:2)....To reject Jesus is to call God a liar (1 John 5:10<sup>±</sup>), and to perish eternally (John 8:24). (See [John Commentary](#))

**Bruce Barton** - Those who received Jesus' testimony believed that he was the Son of God come from heaven, the Messiah. Their belief in his testimony was their "stamp of approval" on the truthfulness of God's action (sending his Son). In other words, they tested the testimony and found it to be true. "**To set one's seal**" to something was a way of saying, "I have identified with this." In ancient days, a person would impress his personal mark on a seal and thereby label the object so sealed as belonging to him or her. (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

**Phillips** - The idea behind this statement is that of confirming a legal document by affixing an official seal to it. Jesus is God's perfect witness. His words are truth, not in a relative sense, but in an absolute sense. When he speaks, it is God who speaks. Those, therefore, who receive the witness of Jesus are attesting to the truthfulness of God. (Borrow [Exploring John](#))

**Set his seal** (4972)([sphragizo](#) from [sphragis](#) = seal, engraved object used to make a mark - denoting ownership, approval, or closure of something normally done by pressing into heated wax usually attached to a document or letter) means to set a seal upon or to mark with a seal. To mark so as to certify that something is so. Seals were used to make something secure, to serve as a guarantee of the correctness of the contents, to indicate authenticity, to indicate ownership. Sacrificial animals were examined and sealed if perfect. Jars, sacks of fruit or grain were sealed. To mark with a seal as a means of identification in Greek secular writings

was used to mark all kinds of animals, so that the mark denoting ownership also carries with it the protection of the owner.

**Marvin Vincent** - To set to, is to affix. To set to a seal is therefore to attest a document. The expression is retained from Coverdale's version (1535). So, "They must set to their hands, and shall set to their hands." Compare also the old legal formula: "In wittnesse qwherof I haue set to myñ seele." Rev., better, hath set his seal to this. The meaning here is, has solemnly attested and confirmed the statement "God is true." Only here in this sense. Elsewhere of closing up for security; hiding; marking a person or thing. See on Rev 22:10. The aorist tense here denotes an accomplished act.

**True** (227)(**alethes** from **a** = negates + **letho** [from **lanthano**] = to escape notice, be hid; See related word **aletheia**) is an adjective which literally describes that which does not escape notice. Thus **alethes** describes that which is manifest, that which is unconcealed, that which conforms to reality (and thus is genuine), that which is in accordance with facts, that which is real (authentic, not imaginary). **Alethes** is used to describe **Jesus** several times in the Gospels - Mt 22:16; Mk 12:14; Jn 7:18. **Alethes** describes that which is true, sincere, real, correct, faithful, trustworthy, genuine, veracious.

**Craig Evans** - The two Greek verbs on which Jn 3:33 is built characterize men and women who have made a final decision. They have acknowledged Jesus, accepted him and his witness, and made a theological deduction about God. To affirm the Sonship of Jesus drives one immediately to affirmations about God, and revelation and truth. John's imagery is graphic. In antiquity wax seals were used to give authentication and ownership to letters and possessions. Even illiterate people could recognize the official seals of important persons. Hence, to embrace Jesus is to set a seal, to confirm and defend an entire constellation of beliefs central to Christian faith and God. (The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary)

### John 3:34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

NET John 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he does not give the Spirit sparingly.

GNT John 3:34 ν γ ρ π σπειλεν θε ς τ ματα το θεο λαλε , ο γ ρ κ μ τρου δ δωσιν τ πνε μα.

NLT John 3:34 For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit.

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

ESV John 3:34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

NIV John 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.

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

CSB John 3:34 For God sent Him, and He speaks God's words, since He gives the Spirit without measure.

NKJ John 3:34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

NRS John 3:34 He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

YLT John 3:34 for he whom God sent, the sayings of God he speaketh; for not by measure doth God give the Spirit;

NAB John 3:34 For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit.

NJB John 3:34 since he whom God has sent speaks God's own words, for God gives him the Spirit without reserve.

GWN John 3:34 The man whom God has sent speaks God's message. After all, God gives him the Spirit without limit.

BBE John 3:34 For he whom God has sent says God's words; and God does not give him the Spirit by measure.

- **For He Whom.** Jn 3:32. Jn 7:16. 8:26-28, 40, 47.
- **has sent.** Jn 3:17. Jn 20:21. 1 Jn 4:14.
- **speaks** Ezek 3:4.
- **the words.** Jn 8:47.
- **for He gives** Jn 3:17. Jn 1:16. 5:26. 7:37-39. 15:26. 16:7. Nu 11:25. 2 Ki 2:9. Ps 45:7. Is 11:2-5. 59:21. 62:1-3. Ro 8:2. Ep 3:8. 4:7-13. Col 1:19. 2:9, 10. Re 21:6. 22:1, 16, 17.
- **Spirit.** Mt 3:16. Ge 1:2. Ps 45:7. Is 11:2. Isa 61:1. Jn 6:63. Lk 11:13. Ac 19:2. 1 Co 14:12, 32. Ga 3:2. Ep 5:18. 1 Th 5:19.
- **without measure.** Ezra 7:22. Ezk 4:11, 16. 12:19. 2 Co 1:22. 5:5. Ep 1:13, 14. 4:7. 5:18. 1 Jn 2:20, 27.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Similar Passages:

John 1:32–33+ John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’”

John 3:17 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

## THE TRINITY PORTRAYED

Notice all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned in this passage, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. See [What does the Bible teach about the Trinity?](#)

**For** (*gar*) is a term of explanation, authenticating Jesus' testimony in Jn 3:32. God's Son, Jesus Christ, does not speak His Own words, but **the words of God.** and He does so by the Holy Spirit the Father gives Him.

**Leon Morris** - This is brought out with the express assertion that Jesus (note the change from “the one who comes from above” to “the one whom God has sent”; for this last expression see Jn 3:17<sup>+</sup>) speaks “**the words of God.**” His **words** are not merely human words, but divine. Therefore, to receive his witness is the same thing as to receive the **words of God.** (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**He Whom God has sent** (*apostello*) **speaks** (*laleo* in *present tense*) **the words of God** - **He** is **God** the Father and the One **sent** is Jesus Who **speaks** the "heavenly language," the **words of God.**

Scriptures referring to God sending Jesus repeatedly affirming His deity and His heavenly origin and His authority. - Jn 3:17; Jn 4:34; Jn 5:24, 30, 36–38; Jn 6:29, 38, 39, 44, 57; Jn 7:16, 28–29, 33; Jn 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; Jn 9:4; Jn 10:36; Jn 11:42; Jn 12:44–45, 49; Jn 13:20; Jn 14:24; Jn 15:21; Jn 16:5; Jn 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; Jn 20:21; Mt. 10:40; Mk 9:37; Lk 4:18; 10:16

**Carson** - Jesus so completely says and does all that God says and does, and only what God says and does (e.g. Jn 5:19–30; 6:37–40; 8:29), that to believe Jesus is to believe God. Conversely, not to believe Jesus is to call God a liar (cf. Jn 12:44–50; 1 Jn. 5:10<sup>+</sup> = "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son."). (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Cole** adds "it is a very serious matter to set aside Jesus' testimony as recorded in the Bible!"

**Utley** adds that "there are two parallel statements in v. 34 which show that Jesus' authority comes from God: (1) God has sent Him, and (2) He has the fulness of the Spirit." ([John 3](#))

**Words** (4487) (*rhema* from verb *rheo* = to speak - to say, speak or utter definite words) refers to the spoken word, especially a word as uttered by a living voice. **Laleo** is another word translated speak but it refers only to uttering a sound whereas *rheo* refers to uttering a definite intelligible word. **Rhema** refers to any sound produced by the voice which has a definite meaning. It focuses upon the content of the communication.

**He gives the Spirit without measure** - The subject **He** is God the Father giving the Spirit to His Son and underscoring the intimate interconnectedness of the Father and the Son.

**THOUGHT** - "This brings out the full humanity of Jesus. As a man, He had to rely constantly on the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26), which enabled Him to speak the true words of God. In this, He modeled for us how we are to live in dependence on God's Spirit." (Steven Cole). (See also [The Holy Spirit-](#)

[Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#)

**Leon Morris** - There is perfect communion between them, and no limit to the gift. His perfect endowment with the Spirit guarantees the truth of his words. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**MacArthur** adds that "Since "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9<sup>±</sup>), there were no limits to the Spirit's power working through Him." (See [John Commentary](#))

What does it mean that the Father gave the Son **the Spirit without measure**? Not in a small degree, but fully, completely. The literal Greek reads "for not by measure does he give the Spirit" which was an ancient idiomatic way to describe something with a limit. And so we read in Leviticus Rabbah 15:2 "The Holy Spirit rested on the prophets **by measure**." That is to say the prophets had a "limit"! But John contrasts Jesus, by stating that the Spirit rests upon Him without measure (or without limit as in NIV, NLT). And so **Guzik** explains that "Jesus is a uniquely reliable revelation, because He has the Holy **Spirit without measure**, in contrast to the previous prophets." The Old Testament prophets were anointed with the Holy Spirit only when they were speaking for God, but Jesus always had the Spirit.

In a sense the writer of Hebrews alludes to greater authority of Jesus' words writing "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." (Heb 1:1-2<sup>±</sup>)

All of the prophets that preceded the great Prophet (Dt 18:15, 18) were "moved by the Holy Spirit (and) spoke from God." (2 Peter 1:21<sup>±</sup>), but only the great Prophet had **the Spirit without measure**. **Carson** adds "Three centuries after John wrote, Rabbi Aha rightly commented that the Holy Spirit who rested on the prophets did so according to the measure (bemišqal) of each prophet's assignment (Leviticus Rabbah 15:2). Not so to Jesus: to him God gives the Spirit without limit... John the Baptist had already testified that he had seen the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus (John 1:32–33+), in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 11:2<sup>±</sup>; Isa 42:1; Isa 61:1<sup>±</sup>)(ED: see also Lk 4:18+); the same truth is repeated in new form." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#), 212)

**George Beasley-Murray** explains that Jesus can speak the words of God "since the Father has given him the Spirit "without measure," and the Spirit to the Jew is supremely the Spirit of prophecy. The saying of R. Aha (Lev. Rab. 15.2) is often cited: "The Holy Spirit who rests on the prophets, rests on them only by measure," for one writes only one book another writes more. To the immeasurable gift of the Spirit to the Son of God corresponds the perfection of the revelation through him. If such a thought is in mind, the perfection of the revelation through the Son is clearly the result of the immeasurable gift of the Spirit to Him. While it is possible grammatically to view the subject of διδωσιν to be "the one Whom God sent," and so to see the Son as the giver of the Spirit, the context demands that the Son is here the receiver of the Spirit. This is confirmed in the next sentence: the Father has given "all things" into his hand, i.e., bestowed on him authority alike in revelatory speech and action. Compare Mt 11:27; but this saying will extend beyond words of God to redemptive deeds of God for the salvation of humankind in his kingdom." (See [John, Volume 36: Revised Edition - Page 54](#))

**Ellicott** - The Rabbis seem to have applied the phrase to prophets and teachers, saying that the Spirit dwelt in the prophets only in a certain measure. Comp. 2 Ki 2:9, where Elisha prays for "a double portion," or, more exactly, a portion of two—the portion of the first-born son (Deuteronomy 21:17)—of the spirit of Elijah. The same thought meets us in St. Paul (himself a pupil of Gamaliel), who speaks of "the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will" (see 1 Cor 12:4-12). The opposite of this thought, then, is before us here. God gives in this case not as in others. The Son who cometh from above is above all. There is no gift of prophet, or of teacher, which is not given to Him. He has the fulness of the spiritual gifts which in part are given to men, and He speaks the very words of God. It will be noted that John is still expounding to his disciples the meaning of his own declaration, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

**John 3:35 "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand."**

NET John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things under his authority.

GNT John 3:35 πατρ ρ γαπ τ υ υ ν κα π ντα δ δωκεν ν τ χειρ α το .

NLT John 3:35 The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands.

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

ESV John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

NIV John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

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

CSB John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands.

NKJ John 3:35 "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

NRS John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.

YLT John 3:35 the Father doth love the Son, and all things hath given into his hand;

NAB John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him.

NJB John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to his hands.

GWN John 3:35 The Father loves his Son and has put everything in his power.

BBE John 3:35 The Father has love for the Son and has put all things into his hands.

- **The Father loves.** Jn 5:20-23. 15:9. 17:23, 24, 26. Pr 8:30. Is 42:1. Mt 3:17. 17:5.
- **the Son.** Jn 3:17, 36. Jn 5:19-26. 6:40. 8:36. 14:13. 17:1. Mt 24:36. 1 J 2:22. 4:14. 2 Jn 3, 9.
- **and.** Jn 13:3. 17:2. Ge 41:44, 55. Ps 2:8. 110:1, 2. Is 9:6, 7. Mt 11:27. 28:18. Lk 10:22. 11:22. 1 Co 15:27. Ep 1:22. Php 2:9-11. He 1:2. 2:8, 9. 1 Pe 3:22.
- **all things.** Jn 5:20. Ge 39:4, 8.
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand - Loves** is [present tense](#) obviously speaking of continual love of the Father for the Son. John has just stated that God **gives the Spirit without measure**, and this passage undergirds the certainty of that truth. The Father loves Jesus and withholds nothing from Him. In Mt 11:27 (Lk 10:22+) Jesus declared "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father."

**Has given** is in the [perfect tense](#) which speaks of the permanence of this divine transaction. "This is an extremely interesting phrase and has numerous parallels (cf. John 13:3; 17:2; Matt. 11:27; 28:18; Eph. 1:20–22; Col. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:22)." (Utley) "Jesus makes the same claim in Jn 5:19–30; Matt. 11:27; 28:18." ([Robertson](#))

**Utley** - This affirmation is repeated in Jn 5:20 and Jn 17:23–26. Believers' relationship to God is founded on His love for the Messiah. Note the number of reasons stated in this context why humans should trust Jesus as the Messiah: (1) because He is from above and above all others (v. 31); (2) because He was sent from God on a mission of redemptions (v. 34); (3) because God continues to give Him the fullness of the Spirit (v. 34); (4) because God loves Him (v. 35); and (5) because God has put everything in His hands (v. 35). ([John 3](#))

**MacArthur** - This last point explicitly states what the first four imply. Because of His love for the Son (cf. Jn 5:20; Jn 15:9; Jn 17:23, 26; Matt. 3:17), the Father has given Him supreme authority over all things on earth and in heaven (Matt. 11:27; 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 1:2; 1 Peter 3:22). That supremacy is a clear indicator of the Son's deity. (See [John Commentary](#))

A s **Carson** says "Even the unfolding of redemptive history finds its ultimate source in the loving relationships in the Godhead." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Leon Morris** - Here the point is that the love of the Father for the Son guarantees the Son's plenipotentiary powers. People may trust the Son in all things, for the Father "has placed everything in his hands." In the context this refers especially to the gift of life in the Spirit. People may come to Christ as they would come to God. Christ, with the full authority of the Father, gives the Spirit bountifully, as the previous verse hints, and gives life eternal, as the following verse makes clear. The words also indicate the dependence of the human Jesus on the Father. (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

For example in Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

**Loves** (25) see note on [agapao](#)

**Craig Evans** - God's love for the Son is so complete that nothing is beyond the Son's reach; anything belonging to God has been placed in the Son's hands. (Ibid)

**John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**

NET John 3:36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him.

GNT John 3:36 πιστεων εστιν υν χει ζω ν α νιον· ο παρθ ν τ υ ο κ ψεται ζων, λλ ργ το θεο μνει π α τ ν.

NLT John 3:36 And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

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

ESV John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

NIV John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

ASV John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

CSB John 3:36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

NKJ John 3:36 "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."

NRS John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

YLT John 3:36 he who is believing in the Son, hath life age-during; and he who is not believing the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God doth remain upon him.'

NAB John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.

NJB John 3:36 Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life: God's retribution hangs over him.'

GWN John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life. Instead, he will see God's constant anger."

BBE John 3:36 He who has faith in the Son has eternal life; but he who has not faith in the Son will not see life; God's wrath is resting on him.

- **He who believes in the Son** Ge 3:15, 16. Jn 1:12. Jn 5:24. Jn 6:40, 47-54. 10:28. 11:25, 26. Jn 20:31. Hab 2:4. Mt 19:16. Ro 1:17. 6:22. 8:1. 1 Jn 3:14, 15. 1 Jn 5:10-13.
- **has eternal life** Mt 18:8.
- **he who does not obey** Heb 5:9.
- **the Son.** Jn 8:24. Ac 4:12. Ro 5:1.
- **will not see life** Jn 3:3. Jn 8:51. Nu 32:11. Job 33:28. Ps 36:9. 49:19. 106:4, 5. Lk 2:30. 3:6. Ro 8:24, 25. Rev 21:8.
- **but the wrath of God** Jn 9:39. 12:40. 2 Ki 22:13. Ps 2:12. Mt 3:7. 22:7, 12. 24:28, 30. 25:12. Lk 19:27. Ro 1:18. 2:4-9, 17. 4:15. 5:9. 11:22. 2 Co 5:11. Ga 3:10. Ep 5:6. Col 3:6. 1 Th 1:10. 2:16. 5:9. He 2:3. 10:29. Jude 1:15. Re 6:16, 17. 11:18.
- **abides on him.** Is 55:7. Jon 4:2. Mt 12:3, 32, 25:46. He 9:27. Re 22:11
- [John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOHN THE BAPTIST GIVES TWO CHOICES

There are only two choices, two ways (Ps 1:6+), two roads (Mt 7:13, 14<sup>±</sup>), two foundations (Mt 7:24-25. 26-27<sup>±</sup>), etc. This is the greatest choice in life. And remember that to not choose for Christ is a choice! Do not be deceived! One choice leads to eternal life now, the other to abiding wrath now and eternal death in the future. (cf Joshua 24:15, Deut 30:15-20).

To put off the choice is to choose not to follow Christ.  
Indecision is a fatal decision.



-- Bruce Barton

**Brian Bell** - John ends with an "alter call" that would shake even the most complacent off the proverbial fence!

**Robertson** - Jesus is the test of human life as Simeon said he would be (Luke 2:34f.+)

As **Barton** says "We are responsible to decide today whom we will obey (Joshua 24:15). God wants us to choose him and life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). God's wrath is his final judgment and rejection of the sinner. To put off the choice is to choose not to follow Christ. Indecision is a fatal decision." (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

**Utley** - These verbals are all PRESENT ACTIVE which speak of ongoing action. Belief is more than a one time decision no matter how sincere or emotional it may have been (cf. Matt. 13:20). This affirms that without knowing Jesus one cannot know the Father (cf. John 12:44-50 and 1 John 5:10). Salvation only comes through a continuing relationship with Jesus, the Son. It is also interesting to note the contrast of "believe" and "obey" in this verse. The Gospel is not only a person whom we receive and a truth that we accept, but it is also a life that we live (cf. Luke 6:46; Eph. 2:8-10). ([John 3](#))

**He who believes in the Son has eternal life** - **Believes** is in the [present tense](#), signifying belief as a lifestyle, which does not speak of perfection but does speak of direction (heavenward and not hell-ward!) The verb **has** is also in the [present tense](#), so that they phrase **has eternal life** indicates present and continuing possession, not just future hope (it is that of course also!) This should elicit a "Hallelujah! Thank You Jesus!" We do not have to wait to see if we will be granted eternal life! In other words **eternal life** begins the moment a person believes in Jesus and is born again.

Jesus reiterates this truth declaring

"Truly, truly, ([amen](#), [amen](#)) I say to you, he who hears ([present tense](#) = continually) My word, and believes ([present tense](#) = continually) Him who sent Me (see [Scriptures on sent](#)), **has** ([present tense](#) = continually has) **eternal life**, and does not (NOT IS ABSOLUTE = ABSOLUTELY DOES NOT) come into judgment (cf Ro 8:1+), but has passed out of (PAST TENSE - the moment of belief in Jesus) death into life." (Jn 5:24+)

John writes in his first epistle...

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1 John 5:11+)

**J C Ryle** - Pardon, peace, and a complete title to Heaven, are an immediate possession. They become a believer's own, from the very moment he puts faith in Christ. They will not be more completely his own, if he lives to the age of Methuselah. The truth before us, is one of the most glorious privileges of the Gospel. There are no works to be done, no conditions to be fulfilled, no price to be paid, no wearing years of probation to be passed, before a sinner can be accepted with God. Let him only believe on Christ, and he is at once forgiven. Salvation is close to the chief of sinners. Let him only repent and believe, and this day it is his own. By Christ all that believe are at once justified from all things. Let us leave the whole passage with one grave and heart-searching thought. If faith in Christ brings with it present and immediate privileges, to remain unbelieving is to be in a state of tremendous peril. If heaven is very near to the believer, hell must be very near to the unbeliever. The greater the mercy that the Lord Jesus offers, the greater will be the guilt of those who neglect and reject it. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

**THOUGHT** - The question for individual believers, then, is: How does our way of living demonstrate the fact that we expect to live eternally? (LAC - [Gospel of John](#) - Borrow)

**Brian Bell** - If baptism were necessary for salvation, then this is the place for the bible to say so; but nothing is said. Instead, the emphasis is on believing.

**J C Ryle** sums up why we should believe in Jesus: "We can never make too much of Christ.... We can never have too high thoughts about Christ, can never love Him too much, trust Him too implicitly, lay too much weight upon Him, and speak too highly in His praise. He is worthy of all the honor that we can give Him. He will be all in heaven. Let us see to it, that He is all in our hearts on earth."

**Spurgeon** comments on **he who believes** - He may think that his not believing is a very small business, but, indeed, it is a barbed shaft shot against the Deity."

**Believes** (4100)([pisteuo](#) rom [pistis](#); [pistos](#); related studies [the faith](#), the [obedience of faith](#)) means to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. To accept as true, genuine, or real. To have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something or someone. To consider to be true. To accept the word or evidence of. **Vincent** notes that [pisteuo](#) "means to persuade, to cause belief, to induce one to do something by persuading, and so runs into the meaning of to obey, properly as the result of persuasion

**But** - This is a dramatic term of contrast in destinies of every man or woman ever borne, either in Heaven or in Hell, eternal life

versus eternal death. There is no in between. There is no second chance. There is no purgatory. To reject the Son is to choose eternal death in the Lake of fire.

**He who does not obey the Son will not see life**- NIV and NET = "rejects the Son." To disobey the Son is to reject Him. "Disbelief is regarded in its active manifestation, disobedience." (Vincent) Note that **obey** parallels **believes**. **Does not obey** in no way suggests that one's obedience merits salvation. What John the Baptist is saying is that the one who genuinely **believes** will genuinely **obey**. After Pentecost every believer was given the Spirit to enable them to obey. A person who says he or she believes in Jesus and yet persistently, habitually, as their lifestyle does not obey the precepts of the Holy Scripture demonstrates that they do not have the ability to obey and thus shows that they are not true believers and will not **see eternal life**, but will experience eternal punishment in hell!

**MacArthur** - The juxtaposition of belief and disobedience is a reminder that the New Testament portrays belief in the gospel as obedience to God, an essential element of saving faith (Acts 6:7+; Ro 1:5+; Ro 15:18+; Ro 16:26+; 2 Th 1:8; Heb 5:9; 1 Pe 1:2+; 1 Pe 4:17+). (See [Obedience of faith](#).)

We see the contrasting ends of those who obey and who do not obey in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you (BELIEVERS), 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire (SECOND COMING), 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God (COMPARE Mt 7:23+) and to **those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus** 9 These (CHRIST REJECTERS) will pay the penalty of eternal destruction (NOT ANNIHILATION BUT LOSS OF THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE CREATED = TO GLORIFY GOD FOREVER!), away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (HELL IS THE ABSENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE! THIS IS INDESCRIBABLE LONELINESS FOREVER!), 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day (SECOND COMING), and to be marveled at among **all who have believed**—for our testimony to you was believed. (2 Th 1:6-10)

**Does not obey** (544)([apeitheo](#) from **a** = without + **peitho** = persuade) literally describes one who refuses to be persuaded and who **disbelieves** willfully and perversely. **Apeitheo** means not to allow oneself to be persuaded; not to comply with and to refuse or withhold belief (in the truth, but elsewhere in Christ, in the gospel) **Apeitheo** speaks of a stubborn, stiff-necked attitude. It speaks of disbelief manifesting itself in disobedience. It is opposed to [pisteuo](#), "believe". **Apeitheo** in the present [context](#) means that these individuals possess an attitude of unbelief. This is not just a momentary lapse in belief or a weakening of belief but a persistent, ongoing unbelief as indicated by the [present tense](#). And how is their persistent unbelief discerned? It is discerned by observing their persistent, deliberate disobedience, their conscious, willful resistance and rebellion against divine authority and their obstinate rejection of the will (the Word) of God - disobedience to divine declaration. Such is their lifestyle, the way they foolishly live their life in continual disobedience against God! To be sure, we all disobey the divine Word from time to time. That is not what John is referring to here. Instead he is describing the individual with an unregenerate, [uncircumcised heart](#) who habitually, continually disobeys (as their lifestyle) what he or she knows to be the truth. **Apeitheo** - 14x in NT - Jn 3:36; Acts 14:2; Acts 19:9; Ro 2:8; Ro 10:21; Ro 11:30; Ro 11:31; Ro 15:31; Heb. 3:18+ (see Heb 3:19 "unbelief" parallels "disobedient") where ; Heb. 11:31; 1 Pe 2:8; 1 Pe 3:1; 1 Pe 3:20; 1 Pe 4:17

#### Related Resources:

- [Why is faith without works dead?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about obedience?](#)
- [What is the relationship of faith, works, and security in salvation?](#)
- [Faith vs. belief—what is the difference?](#)
- [Can a person believe in some sense but not be saved?](#)
- [What is a leap of faith?](#)
- [What are some of the signs of genuine saving faith?](#)
- [What is saving grace?](#)
- [What does it mean to have faith in Jesus?](#)
- [What is the relationship of faith, works, and security in salvation?](#)
- [Where does faith come from?](#)

**But** - A dramatic term of contrast. The contrast is eternal life versus eternal death. It's your choice dear reader. Life or death? Which will it be?

**Steven Cole** - false faith claims to believe, but denies that claim by disobedience (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; Titus 1:16; James 2:18-24; 1 John 2:3). Of course, none of us can obey God perfectly, but the overall direction of our lives should be that of obedience to Christ. This is the only mention of God's wrath in John's Gospel, but it's a frequent theme in his Revelation (6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15) God's wrath is His settled, holy hatred and opposition to all sin. All sin must be punished, or God would not be holy and just. As Jonathan Edwards argued so forcefully in "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners" (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth], 1:669), sin against an infinitely holy God is infinitely heinous and thus worthy of infinite punishment. Those who refuse to believe in Christ are presently under the curse of sin and death. If they die unbelieving, they will experience the fullness of God's wrath throughout eternity. Thus our eternal destiny hinges on believing in Christ or disobeying Him. ([Once More: Why Believe in Jesus?](#))

**The wrath of God abides on him** - The **wrath of God abides** like the [sword of Damocles](#) ([picture](#)) on those who are not believers! If this does not elicit a "Woe!" then I don't know what will! **Abides** is [present tense](#) indicating the wrath of God continually **abides** on the unbeliever and it does so now. He does not say "will abide." The present state of the unbeliever parallels the earlier statement that "He who believes ([present tense](#)) in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been **judged already** (PAST TENSE AND PRESENT CONDITION), because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (Jn 3:18+) The final dispensation of this judgment of course awaits their appearance at the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15+). And so **The wrath of God** is an unbeliever's present state which will continue into the next world. Of course **the wrath of God** now is no comparison to the wrath of God they will experience in their future eternal punishment after their final judgment at the Great White Throne.

**Vincent** - He lives continually in an economy which is alienated from God, and which, in itself, must be habitually the subject of God's displeasure and indignation.

**MacArthur on wrath of God abides** - The idea here is not that God will one day condemn sinners for their disobedient unbelief; they are already in a state of condemnation (3:18; 2 Peter 2:9) from which only saving faith in Jesus Christ can deliver them. (See [John Commentary](#))

John gives the "antidote" for God's wrath writing that "the one who says he **abides** ([present tense](#)) in Him (IN CHRIST) ought (MUST) ([present tense](#)) himself to walk in the same manner as He walked ([present tense](#))." (1 Jn 2:6+) And so if one ABIDES in Him, the **wrath of God** will not ABIDE on him because the wrath of God "ABIDED" on (so to speak) Him on Calvary! John says that proof that you are ABIDING in Christ and assuring that God's wrath won't ever abide on you is that you are walking or living like Christ. Perfectly? Of course not for only Jesus did that! But just as Jesus walked in daily dependence on the Father's will (in continual communion with Him) and in the supernatural power of the Spirit, we should do likewise. And when we do, we confirm that we are abiding in Him. And when we are abiding in Him the wrath of God will NEVER abide on us! See [Walking Like Jesus Walked](#)

Paul alludes to the [present tense](#) aspect of the **wrath of God** in Romans 1:18+ writing "For **the wrath of God** is ([present tense](#) and divine passive = continually being) **revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who ([present tense](#) - continually) suppress (ACTIVELY HOLD IT DOWN!) the truth in unrighteousness."

**Tenny on the wrath of God** - "The word does not mean a sudden gust of passion or a burst of temper. Rather, it is the settled displeasure of God against sin. It is the divine allergy to moral evil, the reaction of righteousness to unrighteousness." (Borrow [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Leon Morris** adds that "'The **wrath of God**' is a concept which is uncongenial to many modern students, and various devices are adopted to soften the expression or explain it away. This cannot be done, however, without doing great violence to many passages of Scripture and without distracting from God's moral character." (Borrow [The Gospel according to John](#))

**Brian Bell - Wrath** was removed on the cross...for those who believed. **Wrath of God** abides on those who do not believe - "you are not like a city ready to be attacked, you are a city already besieged." a) You do not stand at the bar of justice awaiting your sentence; Your sentence is passed already, you are now this day condemned! b) BUT...he who believes in Him is NOT condemned!

Orge is God's settled opposition to and displeasure with sin.

**Wrath** (anger) (3709) (**orge** from **orgaō** = to teem, to swell) conveys the picture of a swelling which eventually bursts, and thus describes an anger that proceeds from one's settled nature. **Orge** does not refer to uncontrollable anger to which men are so prone but to God's settled indignation and controlled passionate hostile feeling toward sin in all its various manifestations. Settled indignation means that God's holiness cannot and will not coexist with sin in any form whatsoever. Orge is not the momentary, emotional, and often uncontrolled anger (thumos - [2372](#)) to which human beings are prone. **Orge** is used primarily of God's holy, righteous wrath but occasionally refers to the wrath of men (see Ephesians 4:31-[note](#)) **Orge** refers to to an inner, deep resentment that seethes and smolders. Orge as used of God refers to His constant and controlled indignation toward sin, while **thumos** (which originally referred to violent movements of air, water, etc., and

consequently came to mean “well up” or “boil up”) refers more to a passionate outburst of rage. **Thumos** type anger represents an agitated, vehement anger that rushes along relentlessly. The root meaning has to do with moving rapidly and was used of a man’s breathing violently while pursuing an enemy in great rage! God’s wrath is his holy hatred of all that is unholy. It is His righteous indignation at everything that is unrighteous. It is the temper of God towards sin. It is not God’s uncontrollable rage, vindictive bitterness or a losing of His temper, but the wrath of righteous reason and holy law.

**Abides** (continues, remains, stays) (3306)(**meno**) in simple terms means to remain in the same place or position over a period of time. It means to reside, stay, live, lodge, tarry or dwell. Menō describes something that remains where it is, continues in a fixed state, or endures.

#### Related Resources:

- Eternal Punishment
- [What is the biblical understanding of the wrath of God?](#)
- [What does it mean that God is a God of justice?](#)
- [What does it mean that God is a consuming fire?](#)
- [What does it mean that hell is referred to as a lake of fire?](#)
- [What is the difference between Sheol, Hades, Hell, the lake of fire, Paradise, and Abraham’s bosom?](#)
- [What is the second death?](#)
- [What is the Great White Throne Judgment?](#)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Every young student knows of Isaac Newton’s famed encounter with a falling apple. Newton discovered and introduced the laws of gravity in the 1600s, which revolutionized astronomical studies. But few know that if it weren’t for Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned from Newton. It was Halley who challenged Newton to think through his original notions. Halley corrected Newton’s mathematical errors and prepared geometrical figures to support his discoveries. Halley coaxed the hesitant Newton to write his great work, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. Halley edited and supervised the publication, and actually financed its printing even though Newton was wealthier and easily could have afforded the printing costs. Historians call it one of the most selfless examples in the annals of science. Newton began almost immediately to reap the rewards of prominence; Halley received little credit. He did use the principles to predict the orbit and return of the comet that would later bear his name, but only AFTER his death did he receive any acclaim. And because the comet only returns every 76 years, the notice is rather infrequent. Halley remained a devoted scientist who didn’t care who received the credit as long as the cause was being advanced.

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#### Two Ways John 3:36 - John Butler

This text shows the two ways men may travel. Choose the right way!

#### FIRST—THE WAY TO HEAVEN

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." This is how one gets on the path to heaven.

- **The faith for the way.** "Believeth." Faith is the Gospel way. "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) There is no room for works in salvation, e.g. baptism, church membership, benevolence etc. Salvation is all of the Lord, we simply must believe.
- **The facts for the way.** "The Son" Jesus Christ is the central theme of salvation. His death on Calvary, His resurrection, His blood, etc. are all necessary for redemption. Remove Christ from the Gospel and you have no Gospel.
- **The fortune in the way.** "Everlasting life." The results of salvation are eternal life in heaven. There is no better fortune anywhere. It is both eternal ("everlasting") and life ("life"). Jesus said, I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). Life is not in a can or needle, but it is in Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel has this promise of real life.

#### SECOND—THE WAY TO HELL

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The last half of our text is how ones gets hell as their eternal abode.

- **The prerequisite for hell.** "Believeth not the Son." Reject Jesus Christ and you will do to hell. Most folks reject Him. Nothing brings out animosity like the mention and/or the following of Jesus Christ.
- **The prohibition of hell.** "Shall not see life." There are no benefits in unbelief. All the advertising of sin is fraudulent. Earlier in this chapter Nicodemus was told he could not "see" the kingdom of God unless he was "born again." Rejecting Christ is hard on the eyesight.

• **The pain of hell.** "Wrath of God" Anyone's anger you can survive, but not the wrath of God. We much prefer to think of the love of God, but reject His beloved Son and you will incur wrath unlike any wrath you have ever experienced.

• **The permanency of hell.** "Abideth." The word "abideth" means to continue upon a person. Other texts tell us that hell is for eternity. What an awful experience for the soul to come to in hell and realize he is to suffer the torments of hell forever. Hell is a result of the wrath of God. Christ rejecters will spend eternity in the fires of hell (Revelation 21:8). Hell is a permanent abode. Once there, you will be there forever. No hope of escape is ever promised. Hell is no joke. Many joke about hell, but all joking will end the moment they get to hell and experience the terrible eternal pains of hell. (Sermon Starters)