

## THE NEW BIRTH: JOHN 3:16-21

In the first fifteen verses of John 3, some significant truths are presented. A Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus and acknowledged Him to be a man from a God, a Teacher, performing signs that validated Him and His message which is the purpose of signs.

The Lord immediately began to address the spiritual need of this Pharisee and presented to him the truth of a spiritual birth, a birth from above, without which no person can see eternal life and the Kingdom of God.

As a Jewish man and a Pharisee, Nicodemus had been born again every way a Jew understood the concept of a new birth. By virtue of being born a Jew, the Jews thought they had experienced a new birth and were guaranteed entrance into the Kingdom. At the age of thirteen, a Jewish male was thought to be born again when he had his bar mitzvah and became subject to the Mosaic Law and responsible for his own sins. Marriage was a new birth for a Jewish male. Nicodemus was a rabbi and upon ordination, they were thought to be born again. As a teacher and the head of a rabbinical school, Nicodemus was considered to be born again. That's why Nicodemus referred to going back into his mother's womb as an old man. He had already been born again every way a Jewish man could be born again and he knew he couldn't start over and do it all again.

Jesus set up a contrast between spiritual birth and natural birth when he referred to being born of water and of the Spirit. Water refers to the physical birth

every person experiences and Spirit refers to the spiritual birth that only believers experience. Every person who will enter the Kingdom of God must experience both birth events; the first birth alone is insufficient for obtaining eternal life. The first birth alone has nothing to do with eternal life.

In fact, in this entire section of John 3:1-21, Jesus used a teaching method composed of a series of contrasts between what is worldly or of the flesh and what is spiritual and therefore of God. That's one way we know that the water of v. 5 cannot refer to believer's water baptism or to the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between earthly things and spiritual things, between good and evil, between belief and unbelief, between judgment and salvation, and between light and darkness, but water baptism would make both elements of the argument in v. 5 refer to spiritual matters which violates the context and the method. Here are all the contrasts in vv. 1-21.

v. 5	physical birth (born of water)	spiritual birth (born of the Spirit)
v. 6	born of the flesh (physical birth)	born of the Spirit (spiritual birth)
v. 12	earthly things	heavenly things
v. 13	descended from heaven (to earth)	ascended into heaven
v. 16	unbelief results in perishing	belief results in eternal life
v. 17	world judged by the Son	world saved by the Son
v. 18	unbelievers judged	believers not judged
v. 19	darkness	Light
	good deeds (implied)	evil deeds
vv. 20-21	evil	truth
	evil hates the Light	truth (good) loves the Light (implied)
	evil does not come to the Light	truth (good) comes to the Light
	evil deeds	good deeds
	fear of evil deeds exposed	good deeds made manifest (exposed)
	evil deeds not wrought in God (implied)	good deeds wrought in God

Jesus referred back to the serpent raised on a pole in the wilderness (Num. 21:6-9) to what would be His work on the cross which was yet to be accom-

plished. In the same way that the Jewish people in the wilderness were saved from death by obeying God and looking to the brass serpent on the pole, people will be awarded eternal life for believing in, or in this context referred to as looking to Him, the Son of Man.

John 3:16 <sup>16</sup>“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.

“For” connects this verse with the immediately preceding verses concerning the new birth and especially with the lifting up of Jesus and the awarding of eternal life to those who believe as it was expressed in vv. 14-15. It is an amazing act of love that the Father gave His Son and that the Son was a guilt offering (Is. 53:10) for the world. This is something that Jesus said He “must” do (Jn. 3:14). It was part of the eternal plan of God that the Son be given on behalf of sinful mankind so that man might obtain to eternal life.

John 3:14-15 <sup>14</sup>“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; <sup>15</sup>so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Isaiah 53:10 <sup>10</sup>But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering...

Love, *ἀγαπάω*, means to have love for someone or something based on sincere appreciation and high regard; love is an attribute of God. God loves His creation including sinful, rebellious mankind. He doesn't simply love those who believe which is the position many pastors and theologians take; He loved the world even as the world hated Him and He continues to love the world today even as the world continues to hate Him. There is no truth to the doctrine that

claims God hates those sinners who are not believers. He doesn't hate people; He loves people.

Romans 5:8 <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ did not die just for believers; He died for everyone. He died to pay the sin debt of the world.

The love God has for the world does not consist of sentimentality or benevolence and it is not an emotional feeling; love expresses His desire to have His creation experience everything He originally created it to experience. He has a plan to bring that about and that plan involves the giving of the Son. Gave,  $\delta\acute{\iota}\delta\omega\mu\iota$ , means to give something usually implying value. But the giving of Christ is more than simply value; it involves infinite value. Christ is not simply someone valuable; He is the preeminently most valuable person giving of Himself to be the most valuable gift that has ever been given. The truth that God the Father loved the world and gave His Son as a love gift to be the guilt offering for the sin of the world exposes the lie that claims the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful, angry God of wrath; He is a God of love and He is a God who has provided the way for not only mankind to have the opportunity to be rescued from the ravages of sin and rebellion but for the world to be restored to God's original intent for it. Love is an important characteristic of God's relationship to His Creation.

1 John 4:8, 16 <sup>8</sup>The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love....  
<sup>16</sup>We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us.

God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Some theologians understand the giving of the Son to refer to the incarnation referring only to the fact that He came to planet earth to live as a true human being. Perhaps it refers to both the incarnation and the cross but in the context of John 3, the Lord had just compared the lifting of the bronze serpent on a pole to His lifting up on the cross; therefore, it seems more reasonable to conclude God's giving in the context of John 3:16 is referring to the Lord's work on the cross. The incarnation does not seem to be what John 3:16 is referring to.

World, κόσμος, can refer to the entire created order as expressed in the universe or to the physical earth which is itself in need of redemption.

Romans 8:19–22 <sup>19</sup>For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

In John 3, the world refers to the people of the God-rejecting, satanic world system who are estranged from God and in desperate need of redemption and reconciliation with God. It refers to the entire population of planet earth. "World" is not limited to the sense of all types of people out of the various tribes, tongues, and nations but instead it is related to every human being who has, is, or will ever live on planet earth. In other words, the doctrine of election that claims only those who God chose to be saved before the foundation of the world has any

chance of obtaining eternal life is a false doctrine. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the sin debt for every human being who has lived or who will ever live and every human being has the opportunity to believe and live. That many, in fact, most people ultimately reject eternal life is a separate issue distinct from their opportunity to attain it.

1 John 2:2 <sup>2</sup>and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

John 1:29 <sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

This is not universalism. The doctrine of universalism makes the claim that because God is love He will not allow anyone to go to the lake of fire and all will eventually be granted eternal life. But the lake of fire was prepared for the devil and his angels and no human being need go there. Every person has the opportunity to respond to the light God has provided and then believe in Him. That the majority of mankind chooses to continue in their rebellion does not mean they didn't have the chance to believe in the first place. Jesus clearly said the lake of fire was created specifically for the devil and those who participated in his angelic rebellion.

Matthew 25:41 <sup>41</sup>"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

This work that Christ performed on behalf of everyone is appropriated simply by believing in Him, that is, in who He is and in what He did on the world's behalf.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4 <sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

The key word in John 3:16, in fact in John's entire gospel, is “believes,” πιστεύω, which means to think something to be true; it is to believe something to the extent of complete trust and reliance in the object of that faith. Throughout John's gospel the importance of believing is emphasized.

John 6:47 <sup>47</sup>“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

There is no qualification restricting this state of eternal life to a certain group of people because the promise from God is “whoever” believes receives eternal life. Without exception, every human being who believes will be granted eternal life; that is the clear promise made to mankind in the Word of God. “Whoever” translates the word πᾶς which simply means “all.” The NASB translation is “that whoever believes in Him” but it could just as easily be translated “that all believing in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Conversely, all who do not believe in Him will perish as the Lord's words in the following Scriptures will make perfectly clear.

It is also clear that belief must be apart from any works whatsoever. Anyone who thinks they must work their way to God is actually saying the work Christ did on their behalf is insufficient and lacking; therefore, they feel a need to “help”

Jesus save them. This thinking destroys the concept of grace. God will not and cannot be indebted to any human being.

Romans 4:4–5 <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

The “only begotten Son” does not mean that Jesus is less than God and it does not mean that He is a created being as some cults suggest. The word μονογενής means that Jesus was unique, the one and only of His kind within a specific, special relationship with God the Father. There has never been and there will never be another person like Him. He is the one and only God-man; truly man and truly God. He is the only One who could remedy mankind's sin problem.

There is a contrast presented here between perishing and eternal life. Perish, ἀπόλλυμι, means to destroy or to cause the destruction of persons, objects, or institutions. In context, it means to be lost in a spiritual sense and that is to exist in a state of separation from God. Perish and death do not mean to cease to exist; they mean to be totally and permanently separated from God and to be consigned to an eternal place of separation from Him. Those who perish or die experience the most crushing loss a human being can ever experience; they lose, for eternity, any possibility of fellowship with their Creator. Everyone possesses life without end, believers and unbelievers alike; the question is where will that life be lived in eternity and what quality of life will that be? Will it be lived as a member of the family of God, which will be a life magnificent beyond our wild-



est imagination, or will it be a spiritually dead life lived in eternal separation from our Creator God which will be a life of unspeakable torment, sadness, and despair? When Jesus returns to earth to set up His Kingdom at the end of the Tribulation, He will preside over the judgment of the sheep and the goats. The goats, those who do not believe in Him as evidenced by their ill treatment and persecution of His Jewish brethren during the Tribulation, will be consigned to the lake of fire which He calls "eternal punishment," αἰώνιος κόλασις.

Matthew 25:41, 46 <sup>41</sup>"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;... <sup>46</sup>"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

At the end of the Millennial Kingdom, there will be a final judgment for all the unbelievers of all time and their fate will also be consignment to the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:14–15 <sup>14</sup>Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The concept of perishing is contrasted with the concept of eternal life, αἰώνιος ζωή, which is available only to those who believe. This eternal life is a life that is never ending; it is truly eternal and it is lived in the presence of God as a member of the family of God. It is real life; it is true life; it is the life that God intended man to have when He created Adam. It is a life of familial fellowship with God and with other believers in the family of God. This eternal life is in complete contrast to eternal death, that is, eternal physical and spiritual separation from God.

Eternal life is imparted to a person at the moment of belief. People obtain this life and it then becomes a continual possession from that point on that can never be lost. All who believe receive eternal life; there are no other restrictions or qualifications for obtaining it. Eternal life is based solely on the promises of God and apart from belief, which is not a work, nothing we have done, nothing we are doing, and nothing we will ever do in the future can negate God's promise of eternal life. Perish does not refer to annihilation as those who reject the doctrine of eternal punishment claim. Perish is the equivalent of what Jesus called "eternal punishment" and it refers to an eternal separation from the Creator God and to conscious torment in the lake of fire.

John 3:17 <sup>17</sup>"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

This verse contains the contrast between judgment and salvation just as the previous verse contrasted perishing and eternal life. In v. 16, it was said that God "gave" the Son; in this verse we learn in addition to being given, He was "sent." Sent, *ἀποστέλλω*, from which we get our word "apostle," means to send someone out with the implication that the sending is for a particular purpose. The purpose is identified here to be the salvation of the world. As we noted earlier, the entire universe needs to be redeemed; even the physical universe was damaged by Adam's sin and rebellion.

But in the larger context of John 3 to this point, the salvation of people is specifically the context. This possibility of salvation is available to all people in

the world but the certainty of judgment is everyone's fate apart from belief in Christ for eternal life. Christ Jesus did not come into the world at His incarnation in order to judge the world; that will come later. He came to seek out and to save that which was lost.

Luke 19:10 <sup>10</sup>“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Judgment, κρίνω, means to judge a person to be guilty and liable to punishment; it is to condemn someone. People can avoid this judgment by availing themselves of the salvation He came to bring. Those saved are granted eternal life and they are not judged in a negative sense; they will only be evaluated and rewarded, or not, for their service to the Lord. Those who reject the salvation made available to them in Christ are condemned and they will be so judged and perish.

We need to understand that God has no desire for any person to remain in a condemned state and liable to this negative judgment; His desire is for all to be saved.

1 Timothy 2:4 <sup>4</sup>who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Further, God has no desire for wicked people to perish and if that is true, then His desire must be that they be saved.

Ezekiel 18:23, 32<sup>23</sup>“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?...<sup>32</sup>“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

The astute Bible student might well say, “But Jesus said He came into the world for judgment” and indeed He did say that.

John 9:39<sup>39</sup>And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”

We always have to consider context before we make any conclusions. In John 9, Jesus had just healed the man born blind and given him sight but the Pharisees were incensed that the Lord did this on the Sabbath. This was an object lesson that spiritually blind people would be enabled to see and the physically seeing people would be made spiritually blind that they might recognize their plight and seek their own healing. The judgment Jesus was bringing on these people was a self-imposed judgment because they saw the signs Jesus was doing and they still rejected Him; therefore, they remained in their unbelief.

Judgment was the result of His first advent, it wasn't the reason He came. In order to save people, He has to pass judgment by exposing the spiritual blindness they live in apart from Him. Some of these people would recognize their spiritual blindness, believe, and, as a result, see. Other people think they have spiritual sight but they can never see because they never acknowledge their lack of spiritual sight. Those who fail to recognize the true nature of their spiritual state will never turn to Christ and therefore they will never gain the ability to see.

Jesus came in His incarnation to save but the idea of perishing in contrast to eternal life and the idea of salvation in contrast to judgment are bound together. To believe and be saved in the present is to be granted eternal life now in contrast to refusing to believe and coming under the judgment that will occur in the future. Life in this age and the unbeliever's final judgment are separated by a time interval. In Romans 1-3, Paul makes it clear that people are in rebellion against God and while they experience some hints of the wrath to come in this age, there is a final judgment they will experience that is still in the future.

Romans 2:5–11 <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: <sup>7</sup>to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. <sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.

There is also a judgment for those believers who possess eternal life now but that too will come later and it will be a judgment for rewards and not for condemnation. It is not the same judgment to and for wrath that the unbelievers will experience. It seems to be better to understand the Βῆμα as an evaluation rather than as a judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:10 <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

John 3:18 <sup>18</sup>“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.

Belief is “in Him” or “through Him.” This truth is so important it is expressed four times in vv. 16-18. We are not saved by believing some things about Him; we are saved by believing in Him, that is, in who He is and in what He did on behalf of sinful mankind including each one of us as individuals. To be more precise, believing in Him is a personal appropriation based on belief, faith, and trust of what He did specifically for me as an individual human being; He has provided for me what I could never provide for myself and that is the forgiveness of sin, the gift of eternal life, and adoption into the family of God. He accomplished this work on the cross. And He has done that for you as well as for me. We cannot be saved on the basis of anything we do; we are saved only on the basis of what He has done for us and He has done all that is necessary to save us. Our salvation is an entirely free grace gift from God based only on the requirement of believing in Him for it.

Ephesians 2:8–9 <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Note the contrast John has in this verse. Those who believe are not judged but those who do not believe are under judgment and remain under judgment unless and until they believe in Him. If you are an unbeliever, you are right now under God's judgment.

In terms of John 3, judgment is solely the prerogative of Christ Jesus.

John 5:22, 24 <sup>22</sup>“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,... <sup>24</sup>“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.

Those who believe in Him are spared judgment in the negative sense; those who do not believe in Him will not escape judgment, in fact, they are already judged by virtue of their sin in and with Adam. This is not a proclamation that people are living in a possible state of condemnation; it is a warning that they need to escape the state of condemnation in which they already live and exist. That escape is available to people only through Christ. Anyone who fails to believe in Him continues living life in condemnation until they either place their faith in Him or they die in which case their fate is sealed and they face judgment.

Apart from Christ, mankind is guilty, judged, and condemned. In Romans 5, Paul articulated and further explained the contrast between the fate of the saved and the unsaved Jesus presented in John 3:18.

Romans 5:12, 15, 18 [the unsaved] <sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...<sup>15</sup>...For if by the transgression of the one the many died...<sup>18</sup>So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men...

In contrast, are those who believe and therefore receive the free gift.

Romans 5:15, 17-18 [the saved] <sup>15</sup>But the free gift is not like the transgression...much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many....<sup>17</sup> much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the

One, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>...even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

There is an interesting truth presented in the tense used in two of the verbs in this verse (Jn. 3:18). “[H]as been judged” [κέκριται from κρίνω] and “has not believed” [μὴ πεπίστευκεν from πιστεύω] are both in the perfect tense which means the judging and the not believing have occurred in the past with continuing results. This is saying that these people are in an ongoing state of unbelief resulting in condemnation because they refuse to enter into a state of belief.

John 3:19 <sup>19</sup>“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.

John continues his series of contrasts in these verses by contrasting Light and darkness. This is the contrast between what is good and what is evil; between those who are in Christ and those who walk in the darkness of the world system. More importantly, in this verse it is also referring to Jesus as the Light that is rejected by those who prefer the darkness. This is not the first mention of Christ as the Light in the apostle’s book.

John 1:4–9 <sup>4</sup>In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. <sup>5</sup>The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. <sup>6</sup>There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. <sup>9</sup>There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

The Light of Christ broke into the world to enlighten people and that Light continues to shine [έρχομαι, “has come” is a perfect tense verb indicating the Light continues to shine to this very day]. Even though the Lord is not physically



present at this time, the Light, His Light, is present in the world. Darkness did not and cannot overpower or overcome it even though it wants to do so. Satan and those who are in Satan's domain hate the Light and they love darkness instead. The Light of Christ does in some way enlighten every person. Romans 1:18-19 presents the truth that men know God but deliberately suppress the truth of Him in unrighteousness; therefore, people have been exposed to a general but innate knowledge of God and Christ because God has made it evident to them and in creation (Rom. 1:20). That knowledge should lead people to desire more knowledge but they reject it and prefer to remain in darkness. In fact, the world hates the Light.

Romans 1:18–20 <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Any person who is not a believer is in the state of unbelief because they want to be an unbeliever and remain in unbelief and remain in rebellion against God.

Paul would also elaborate on the truth that judgment is now being experienced by those who reject the Light and who live in concert with the world system. Their final judgment awaits the future but they do undergo temporal judgment right now. Many of the sins they engage in now are the judgment; man was not meant to live in this sinful manner.

Romans 1:24, 26-28, 32 <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.... <sup>26</sup>For this reason God

gave them over to degrading passions... <sup>27</sup>...receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. <sup>28</sup>And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,... <sup>32</sup>and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

The Light was not a mystery. Hundreds of years before Christ's incarnation, the prophet Isaiah predicted that people living in darkness in the Galilee would see a great light (Is. 9:1-2) and Matthew confirmed that the fulfillment of this prophecy was in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 4:14–16 <sup>14</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>15</sup>“THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES— <sup>16</sup>“THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.”

In early Greek, darkness was used in a figurative sense to refer to death and certainly those who are walking in darkness are in the state of spiritual death. In Hebrew, the concept of darkness was also connected with death and the Septuagint used the same Greek word in Isaiah that was used in John to translate “darkness.” That word for darkness, σκότος, means a lack of light. Technically, as a physical phenomenon, darkness does not exist; darkness is merely the absence of light. Figuratively, it is used in John to mean the realm of sin and evil which is the world system Satan has in operation. This is the darkness that the people of the world system prefer. Some lexicons suggest this word means ignorant in this verse (John 3:19), but it cannot mean that. People are enlightened

by the Light, however, they deliberately reject the Light, suppress the Light, and oppose the Light. That's not ignorance; that's rebellion against God.

Jesus later proclaimed that all who are in Him are walking in the Light and have therefore left the domain of darkness.

John 8:12 <sup>12</sup>Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

Jesus is not just the Light of those who are saved but He is the Light of the world; He enlightens everyone. Whether they like the Light or accept the Light is another matter and clearly, the majority of people want to remain in the darkness of Satan's unregenerate world system. Once the Light is accepted, the saved person no longer walks in the darkness that otherwise envelopes the world. The fact that Christ Jesus is the Light and that Light is life allows those who are in Him to have that life which is life eternal. That life is also a quality of life that is immeasurably superior to the life lived in darkness. Up to the point of the new birth, everyone has walked in darkness and everyone who is born again then leaves the darkness for the Light.

Ephesians 5:8 <sup>8</sup>for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light

Once a person responds to the Light and experiences justification salvation, there is an expectation that they will walk as people who are in Christ ought to walk. That's a sanctification salvation issue for those who desire to be disciples of Christ and it is truth beyond our Scripture today, but it is truth that we would do well to heed.

Peter also acknowledged that those who are in the Light have a responsibility to proclaim the Lord.

1 Peter 2:9 <sup>9</sup>But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

It is very apparent this concept of Light is extremely important not only concerning our new birth but also our sanctification. With salvation then, comes responsibility.

The word "judgment," κρίσις, refers to the process people are going through as they live and exist in the darkness. People choose the darkness and reject the Light and they do this because they want to remain in that state. They deliberately shun and reject the Light. Christ, the Light, has appeared to the Jewish people and many of them, perhaps most of them, and certainly the leadership of the nation, rejected Him then and are rejecting Him now. The Light is not forcing them to stay in this state; they choose to remain in it. They love being in the darkness. This Scripture is clearly telling us that all people make a choice about their attitude toward the Light and about salvation; no person is compelled to believe. This is, at least in some sense, self-condemnation because people reject the remedy provided by the Light in favor of remaining in darkness.

John 3:20–21 <sup>20</sup>"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Unbelievers do evil deeds commensurate with their position engaged in and with the world system. Their deeds are evil but that is to be expected from those who are un-

regenerate and in need of the new birth, which is a spiritual birth only God can provide. That has been the point of this John 3 pericope.

The contrast continues in these two verses with evil opposing truth which is implying good and Light is presented in contrast with evil and darkness which is also implied in the context. Additionally, there is a contrast between those who come to the Light and those who do not come to the Light and between those who fear their deeds will be exposed because they are not only evil but they are not of God and opposed to Him contrasted with those whose deeds will be made manifest because they are wrought in God by God's people who are in the Light.

Evil, φαῦλος, means bad, evil, and moral baseness which is contrasted with truth, ἀλήθεια, which means truth; it refers to facts that correspond to reality, which in this case is spiritual reality. Everything about God is true and real. Truth has a range of meanings, but in this context it is used in a figurative sense and in contrast to evil it refers to that which is good according to the standards of the Light.

Evil deeds will be exposed, ἐλέγχω, which means to expose; it is to state that someone has done wrong with the implication that there is adequate proof of such wrongdoing. But those who do these things are afraid of having them exposed. Why is that? They know God and they know they are in rebellion against Him and they know they will be ashamed if they are exposed. Everyone has a God-given conscience and it bears witness in their own heart against their rebellious behavior.

Romans 2:14–15 <sup>14</sup>For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup>in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

In contrast, those who are in Christ and walking in the Light want their work done on His behalf exposed for all to see because what they do in His name glorifies Him. What believers do for Him now will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ and that will have eternal consequences.

What applications and lessons have we learned from these Scriptures?

1. God loves His created world including the people in it.
2. Every person who believes in the person and work of Christ Jesus will be granted eternal life. This is without qualification. Every human being can appropriate God's gracious gift of eternal life based only on faith. No exceptions.
3. The Father sent and gave the Son in order to provide the opportunity for salvation for the world.
4. Sinful mankind is in rebellion against God and wants to stay that way. Light entered the world in the person of Jesus Christ but men prefer the darkness, in fact, the unsaved natural man hates the Light and deliberately seeks to avoid the Light.
5. People must come to faith in order to escape judgment. Those who believe are not judged but the one who refuses to believe is now under the judgment of God. The sin nature inherited from our father Adam has every person standing condemned. The only escape is to believe in the person and work of the only begotten Son of God who died for the sin of the world.

If you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation to eternal life, won't you please consider it right now?

Saving faith is the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died and rose again to pay one's personal penalty for sin and the one who gives eternal life to all who trust Him and Him alone for it.

It is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus the Christ alone as he is identified in the Bible alone that enables us to be granted eternal life and to be reconciled to God. It is belief in Christ plus nothing.

