Introduction
- This discussion w/ Nicodemus was actually set up by the conflict with the Jewish leaders at the end of Ch. 2

1. The Challenge was Demanding (John 2:18)

2. The Challenge was Dark (2:18)
3. The Challenge Demonstrated Defilement (2:18)
4. The Challenge Spoke of Destruction (2:19)

5. The Challenge was Alarmingly Unknowing (20-21)
6. The Challenge Mocked Them (20)
7. The Challenge Showed that They Didn’t Truly Understand (21)

- The Jews acted on what was their apparent pre-conceived notions and allowed them to control their actions/responses to what should have been very clear and easy to understand demonstrations of Who it was they were dealing with!!
- There should have been no cloud to their perception!

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2:18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

18 “Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things”

19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.
• They had signs and those signs ought to have been enough to show just Who Jesus was!!
• Jesus gave them back what seems to be a fairly sullen, almost short-tempered answer...

\[2:18\] So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

\[19\] Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

\[20\] Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

\[21\] But He was speaking of the temple of His body. \[22\] Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

• He ultimately showed Himself to be The Discerner of Hearts

\[23\] Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. \[24\] But Jesus did not commit Himself to them,

• Now, chapter 3 enlarges on the knowledge of Christ and the Gospel.
  • It contains the most famous of all Scripture texts, namely, John 3:16.
  • This third chapter of John may be divided into two major parts as follows:
    • A. The Interview With Nicodemus (John 3:1–21)
    • B. The Interval Between Events (John 3:22–36)
  • John 3:1–21
    • This passage in John 3 about the interview Christ had with Nicodemus concerning the Gospel is one of the greatest passages in Scripture regarding the Gospel.
The Interview With Nicodemus

Wednesday, October 16, 2019

- Bishop Ryle said it was “one of the most important passages in the whole Bible.”

I. The Inquiry About the Gospel (John 3:1, 2, 10)

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

10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?

- John 3:1–2: Nicodemus was rich, he was highly educated, he was interested in spiritual matters, he had a solid grasp of Old Testament Scripture - but he knew something was missing in his life.
- A theologian approached a carpenter and graciously acknowledged him as a teacher from God because of the signs.
- This common misperception of the gospel appears throughout John’s book because Jesus repeatedly emphasized that the signs were indicators of the real message.

- The purpose of the interview was Nicodemus’ desire to know about the Gospel.
- So he came to Christ to inquire of the Gospel message which Christ was proclaiming.
  - Nicodemus' three steps:
    - He came to Jesus (Jn. 3:12a).
    - He testified for Him (Jn. 7:50-51).
    - He did service for Him (Jn. 19:39).

A. The man in the inquiry.

- Nicodemus, the man who came to Christ for the interview, was no ordinary man.
  - Three significant titles are given him.

  1. First, the party of the man.

    “Man of the Pharisees” (John 3:1).
• The Pharisees were the most conservative (read as fundamentally Legalistic) (not just as “doing religious stuff) religious party at that time.
• However, they had made religion a matter of externals instead of internal.
• With a few exceptions (Nicodemus being the chief exception), they were very bitter and vicious in their opposition of Christ.
• This was because, even at this early point in His ministry, they knew He was speaking “against” their concept of what was pleasing to God!!
• At least it seems that Nicodemus was a part of this perspective and view when Jesus confronted him...

2. Second, the position of the man.

“Ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1).

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.”

• This term meant Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin, that powerful group of seventy men who ruled Israel religiously.
• The use of the term “Rabbi” was significant especially since it was known that Jesus did not have formal rabbinic training (cf. 7:14-15).

14 Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. 15 And the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?”

3. Third, the profession of the man.

“Master of Israel” (John 3:10).
• The word translated “Master” means teacher.
• Nicodemus was a teacher by profession, and he was a very esteemed teacher as the word “a” before “Master” is in the Greek a definite article which emphasizes the excellence of Nicodemus as a teacher and says he was considered by Israel as their greatest teacher.

B. The moment of the inquiry.
• The time which Nicodemus came to Christ was “by night” (John 3:2).

1. First, it was a convenient moment.
• “By night” was obviously a convenient time to speak with Christ.
• During the day Christ would be busy with many things which would prevent a lengthy discussion, and Nicodemus doubtless had things to do during the day, too.

2. Second, the concealment in the moment.
• “By night” says it was apparent that Nicodemus wanted his inquiry of Christ to be concealed.
• He, along with Joseph of Arimathea, did not make a public confession of support for Christ until they buried Him (John 19:38–42).

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in
which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

- **Once Nicodemus showed** some subtle support for Christ when he appealed to his fellow Pharisees that they should not judge before they hear out the accused (John 7:51).

  “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”

- It is **significant** that **every one of the three times Nicodemus is mentioned** it is reported that he **came to Jesus by night**.
- That strongly supports the conclusion that he wanted his visit to Christ to be under the cover of darkness.
- Nicodemus **did not want** his fellow Pharisees or Sanhedrin members knowing he was interested in Christ.
- Nicodemus was **concerned about losing esteem and position**.

C. The manner of the inquiry.

- Nicodemus’ inquiry was **done in good taste compared to the typical Pharisee inquiry to Christ**.

  1. **First, the politeness in the manner**.

    “Rabbi” (John 3:2).

    - Nicodemus could have called Christ a better name, for Christ was **more than a “Rabbi,” but at least Nicodemus was sincere**.
    - This was the **term used to speak respectfully of a teacher in those days**.
    - There was a **technical use of the term in which it represented officialdom in religious circles**.
    - But in this case it was simply a **courteous term** of genuine respect.
2. **Second, the persuasion in the manner.**

   “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” (John 3:2).

   - Nicodemus **supports his view of Christ by the miracles.**
     - However, **he missed Who Christ really was.**
     - The **miracles said Christ was more than one sent from God to teach** but was **one sent from God to save.**
     - He **was the promised Messiah,** and Nicodemus **should have seen in the miracles and teaching this fact.**
   - Finished last time talking about the MANNER with which Nicodemus approached Christ:
     - We said there was a certain **POLITENESS** in his manner “Rabbi” - v2
     - There was a persuasion in his manner (above)

### II. The Introduction to the Gospel (John 3:3, 5–8)

- 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 quite a number more.
- Christ **did not waste any time getting around to telling Nicodemus** about the Gospel.
  - **His response** to Nicodemus’ inquiry was **to immediately state some basic facts about the Gospel.**
  - Christ knew the heart of Nicodemus and the real reason he **came to Christ,** so Christ **got right to the main subject, namely, the matter of salvation.**
A. The nature of the new birth.
- The Gospel describes salvation as a new birth.

1. First, it is a distinctive birth.
- There are five different births known to men.
  - The soil birth was when Adam was formed from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7).

  And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

  • Second, the surgical birth was when God made Eve from a rib out of Adam (Genesis 2:21, 22-3).

  21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

  22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

  • 23 And Adam said:
    “This is now bone of my bones
    And flesh of my flesh;

    • She shall be called Woman,
    Because she was taken out of Man.”

  • Third, the sac birth is when a babe is born from the water sac of the mother.
  • The fourth birth is the Savior’s birth when Christ was born of Mary which is called the virgin birth.
  • Spoken of here is the 5th kind of birth spoken of in the Bible:
    • The fifth birth is the Spiritual birth (John 3:5) which is the new birth when a person comes to Christ and is saved.
Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

2. Seven Except's

1) Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Lk. 13:1-5).

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

2) Except ye become converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:3).

and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

3) Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3; 1Jn. 2:29; 3:8; 5:1-14,18).

Jn 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.”

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

4) **Except** a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5).

*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.

5) **Except** ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you (Jn. 6:53).

*Then Jesus said to them,* “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

6) **Except** your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:20).

*For I say to you,* that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

7) **Except** ye abide in me ... he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (Jn. 15:4-6).

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*

• Just as a note...John 3:5 - **Various interpretations have been suggested for the meaning here of “water”:**
1) Some think it refers to baptism as a requirement for salvation. However, this would contradict many other NT passages (Eph. 2:8–9);

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

- Nothing, NOTHING we can or actually do can contribute or secure our redemption!
- It is important for us to keep that standard at the front of our thinking...

2) It stands for the act of repentance that John the Baptist’s baptism signified;

3) It refers to natural birth (specifically, the fluid released when the amniotic sac breaks prior to labor); thus it means “unless one is born the first time by water and the second time by the Spirit”;

4) It means the Word of God, as in John 15:3;

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

5) It is a synonym for the Holy Spirit and may be translated, “by water, even the Spirit.”

- One truth is clear: the new birth is from God through the Spirit.
- In this context, it seems clear that Jesus is speaking of the “water” of natural birth.

- So, First, it is a distinctive birth

2. Second, this speaks of a divine birth.
- “Born of the Spirit” (John 3:6,8).

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes,
and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- Leave out God and you will not have the new birth.
  - Being a Divine birth invalidates any idea that man can save himself by good works.
- So...This speaks of a...
  - A Distinctive birth
  - A Divine birth

3. Third, this is a dynamic birth.
- By this we mean that the new birth is not some small thing that has little impact on a person.
  - Rather it has a dynamic impact on a person and brings a dynamic change for a person.
  - Being born again is the greatest life changing experience you can ever have.
  - The biggest change from this new birth is your eternal destiny from hell to heaven.
  - Changes in this life include such things as
    - new desires,
    - new values,
    - new priorities,
    - new hopes and
    - new attitudes.

B. The need of the new birth.
- The importance of the new birth is especially seen in the need of the new birth.

1. First, the need is universal.

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... Ye must be born again” (John 3:3, 7).

- The word “man” means everyone, and
• “Ye” tells us that even high religious position is not exempt from the need to be born again.

2. Second, the need is urgent.

“Verily, verily” (John 3:3, 5)

• “Verily, verily” is twice stated and it indicates something very important.
  • If it is important it is urgent!

III. The Ignorance About the Gospel (John 3:4, 9–13)

• Nicodemus expresses amazing ignorance, about Spiritual matters, about the Gospel.

A. The comments a Result of ignorance.

• Nicodemus’ comments were evidence of his ignorance.
• He manifests his ignorance in three ways.

1. First, the “carnalizing” of the new birth.

“How can a man be born when he is old?” (John 3:4).

• This question showed that Nicodemus was woefully ignorant of the new birth.
  • He put a carnal meaning to the spiritual truth.
    • Such an incredible danger for us as we seek to understand and live out what the Bible says...
    • We MUST take pains to see to it that we interpret things in the manner that God intended them and not in a human, worldly fashion...
    • That takes some work, but is more than worth doing!
    • We need to do the study and the prayer that will allow God to invest the spiritual maturity needed to live and act as a mature servant of Christ and not as a small spiritual child!
2. **Second, the contempt of the new birth.**

   “Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3:4).

   - It seems evident that he simply cast aside what Jesus was saying...
     - He almost ridiculed what Jesus was saying...
     - In reality he was missing Christ’s meaning of the new birth, he asks if a person has to be put in their mother’s womb a second time to be “born again.”
   - This statement was contemptuous.
   - Nicodemus was like many who, if they don’t understand something, mock it rather than seek to understand it.
   - They seem to wish to think and understand spiritual matters in carnal or fleshly terms...

3. **Third, the conclusion about the new birth.**

   “How can these things be?” (John 3:9).

   - Nicodemus did not understand the new birth message at all.
     - The fact that he, an intelligent man with a high religious position, did not understand the new birth should encourage those who witness and preach.
     - Even though we make the message crystal clear, the heart of unbelief often does not understand it.
     - It takes more than a good argument (as good as that may be) to convince people about the Gospel.
     - It also takes the work of the Spirit of God in the heart to help man to understand the Gospel message.
The Interview With Nicodemus

B. The condemnation of ignorance.

- Mankind honors spiritual ignorance, but Jesus Christ rebuked it.
  
  1. First, the position of Nicodemus condemns his ignorance.

     “Art thou a master [teacher] ... and knowest not these things” (John 3:10).

     - As we noted earlier, the “a” is a definite article indicating that Nicodemus was an exceptional and well-respected teacher.
     - His high position as a teacher condemns him for not perceiving the truth about the new birth.
     - Spiritual ignorance, however, is often found in high places.

  2. Second, the privilege of Nicodemus condemns his ignorance.

     “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:10).

     - Nicodemus had tremendous spiritual advantage being an Israelite, for the Israelites had the Scriptures.
     - “What advantage then hath the Jew? ... chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1, 2).

     - Yet with all this privilege, Nicodemus was still ignorant of the most important spiritual truth of all.
     - The position Nicodemus had made his ignorance inexcusable.
     - Our land abounds with spiritual opportunities and advantages; yet spiritual ignorance abounds which makes judgment great for our land.
But a word of extreme caution needs to be added here lest the reader interpret the text in terms of the later doctrines of sacrament or ordinance.

3. **The cause of ignorance.**

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“Ye receive not our witness” (John 3:11).
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- **Rejection of the truth was the cause** of the spiritual ignorance of Nicodemus, and **Nicodemus rejected the truth even though it came from the best of sources**, namely, Jesus Christ.
  - He was not hearing this message from some bum on skid row **but from the highest source possible**.
  - Likewise, to reject the Gospel message is to disbelieve the Bible, the **most reliable witness of all**.
  - Reject truth from a reliable source and **ignorance will be the consequence**.

C. **The curse of ignorance.**

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“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:12).
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- In essence Christ told Nicodemus **if you do not believe when you hear My first lesson, what will you do when you hear My second**;
  - if you stumbled at the alphabet how will you perceive words.
  - **Unbelief of elementary spiritual truth will make you ignorant of further spiritual truth**.
We spoke of the state of Ignorance that Nicodemus was in...

- The Condemnation his position brought
- The Condemnation his privilege brought
- The Real Cause of His Ignorance
- The Curse his Ignorance Brought Upon him

“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:12).

D. The countering of ignorance.

- Removing spiritual ignorance comes only by knowing Christ.
- Christ gives some significant facts about Himself here.

1. First, the position of Christ.

“No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven” (John 3:13).

- Ascending up to heaven here means to be in the higher councils and throne room with God Himself (cp. Isaiah 14:13 and Satan’s desire).

  - For you have said in your heart:
    ‘I will ascend into heaven,
    I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
    I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
    On the farthest sides of the north;

- What Christ says here is that He is indeed qualified to speak of heavenly things, for He has been part of heavenly councils.
- He was, therefore, an excellent witness.
2. Second, the pre-existence of Christ.

“He that came down from heaven” (John 3:13).

- Coming down from heaven says Christ already existed before He came to earth.
  - This fact emphasizes His deity.

3. Third, the Prince in Christ.

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. (John 3:13).

- This title, which is used some 88 times in the New Testament of Jesus Christ, speaks of the Messiahship of Christ.
  - It is a term that emphasizes Christ’s humanity, for it was in His humanity that He could claim the throne of David as king of Israel.
  - This position is much higher than what Nicodemus ascribed to Him.

4. Fourth, the presence of Christ.

“Which is in heaven” (John 3:13).

- This is a tremendous statement, for it says that Christ was in heaven even as He spoke to Nicodemus on earth.
  - This says Christ is omnipresent.
  - This makes Him more than a “teacher come from God” (John 3:2) as Nicodemus thought, but rather it makes Him God come to teach.
IV. The Illustration of the Gospel (John 3:14, 15)

\[
\begin{align*}
14 & \text{ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,} \\
15 & \text{ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.}
\end{align*}
\]

- Christ resorts to illustrating the Gospel in simplicity by using the example of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to stop the death plague that had come upon the people.
  - The Bronze Serpent and by implication this passage gives a great picture of the bearing of sin on the Cross

A. The corruption for the cross.

\[ “The people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loathes this light bread” (Numbers 21:5). \]

- Israel’s conduct at the time was reprehensible.
  - They spoke against God and His servant; they despised the way of God and the provisions of God.
  - This corrupt conduct provoked judgment (which we will see next) which demonstrated the need of the cross (illustrated here by the pole with the serpent on it—John 3:14-15).

\[
\begin{align*}
14 & \text{ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.} \\
15 & \text{ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.}
\end{align*}
\]

B. The curse for the cross.

- The corrupt conduct brought a curse which could only be remedied by the cross (the pole with the serpent on it).
1. First, the **discomfort** of sin.

   “The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people” (Numbers 21:6).

   - Sin brings pain and sorrow.

2. Second, the **Defilement & Terrible Effect** of sin.

   “Much people of Israel died” (Numbers 21:6).

   - The snakes were poisonous, and **when they bit the people, their poisonous venom defiled the bodies of those bitten**.
     - **Sin corrupts, pollutes, and defiles**.
     - Filthy minds, mouths, morals, and manners are abundant in society because of sin.
     - On top of that, **Paul told Timothy that the effects and manifestation of these effect will multiply greatly at the end times**:

   > 2 Tim. 3:1-9 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

   - Sin, present in men for Millenia will grow and show itself in an unprecedented degree and fashion!
3. Third, the death from sin.

“Much people of Israel died” (Numbers 21:6).

- Sin brings death.

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

C. The command for the cross.

- The corruption of the people and the curse on the people brought a need for the cross (pole and serpent).

1. First, the Source of the command.

“The Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole” (Numbers 21:8).

- The Gospel was God’s idea.
  - It certainly was not man’s idea.

2. Second, the singularity of the command.

- There was only one pole and serpent.
  - There were not a dozen poles and serpents.
  - There is only one way of salvation.
  - That is through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

3. Third, the serpent in the command.

“Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole” (Numbers 21:8).

- Let’s just note that the OT serpent on the pole pictures Christ in two significant ways.
a. The *sinlessness* of Christ.
   - The serpent had no poison in it, for it was made of bronze, it was not a real serpent.

b. The *shame taken on* by Christ.
   - The serpent on the pole pictures the curse Christ took upon Himself to provide for our salvation.
     - The curse is emphasized in a twofold way here.
       - It is emphasized in the curse on the serpent - The serpents curse originated in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:14).

   So the Lord God said to the serpent:

   “Because you have done this,
   You are cursed more than all cattle,
   And more than every beast of the field;
   On your belly you shall go,
   And you shall eat dust
   All the days of your life.

   ——

   - Also the serpent on the pole demonstrates another form of the curse on Christ.

   “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”
   (Galatians 3:13).

   ——

   - 4. Fourth, the saliency in the command.
     - Prominent or conspicuous

   “Set it upon a pole” (Numbers 21:8).

   - The pole with the serpent upon it was set up in the camp of the Israelites where all could see it.
     - It was therefore accessible to all who were bitten.
• Moses did not set up the pole on some mountain many miles away where no one could see it and be healed.
• The Gospel is accessible to all men everywhere.

D. The cure in the cross.

“Everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” (Numbers 21:8).

• The serpent on the pole, like Christ on the cross was the cure for sin.

1. First, the faith in the cure.

“Looketh upon it.” (Num 21:8b)

• It was a look of faith in God’s Word that gained healing.
• So it is faith that brings salvation.

“By grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

2. Second, the focus in the cure.

“When he beheld the serpent of brass” (Numbers 21:9).

• The focus was on the serpent.
  • In the Gospel the focus is upon the Christ Who died on the cross.

3. Third, the favor in the cure.

So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:9).

• Life came to those who looked upon the serpent on the pole.
• Likewise life (eternal) comes to those who look to the Christ of the cross to save them (John 3:14-15).

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

V. The Inspiration for the Gospel (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”.

• It was God’s love that is the great inspiration for the Gospel.
  • This text on God’s love is one that many consider to be the greatest text in all the Bible.

A. The proclamation of God’s love.

“This God ... loved the world”

• This is a tremendous proclamation.

1. First, it is unexpected by man.
  • Nicodemus knew God to be a God of holiness, of law, and of judgment.
    • But the Pharisees did not stress the love of God.
    • One can understand why, for when you consider how evil man is, one would not think God would love mankind.
    • But He does.

2. Second, it is unequaled in religion.
  • Heathen religions have no gods that love like this.
  • Their gods are cruel gods, capricious gods, and corrupt gods.
3. **Third, it is unexcelled in its effect.**
   - When one proclaims their love for a person, **it can affect the person who is loved in a great way.**
   - No proclamation of love **ever affected man so wonderfully and blessedly as this proclamation of Divine love.**

B. **The pattern of God’s love.**

   “So loved.”

   - In the Greek, the word translated “so” has several meanings.
     - **One meaning is** “in this manner ... in the way described” (Thayer).
     - This tells us that God’s love is patterned after the illustration which Christ had just given Nicodemus about the bronze serpent being lifted upon on the pole **for the healing of the rebellious Israelites.**
   - **In spite of man’s sin,** God’s love provided a remedy for the Israelites.
     - Likewise in spite of our sin, **God’s love provided a remedy for us.**
     - “So” Christ gave His life on the cross for us.

C. **The passion of God’s love.**

   “God So loved.”

   - Another meaning of the word translated “so” involves intensity and means “so greatly” (Thayer).
     - God **never does anything halfway or halfhearted.**
     - If God loves someone, it **will be as no one else loves.**
D. The *persistency* of God’s love.

“*God so Loved.*”

- The word being *past tense* says God loved us before we were redeemed, *not just after we are redeemed.*
- Past tense *does not mean* He does not love us now.
- *His love is also present-tense* which means it is always abiding always with us (Romans 8:37-39).

*Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- The *past tense* here simply shows us how early God loved us.
- God *does not love us because of what we are but because of what He is.*
- “*God is love*” (I John 4:8).

*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

E. The *perimeter* of God’s love.

“*The World.*”

- No perimeter of love is *so large.*
- No love *has embraced so many.*
- *If we love a few* neighbors, relatives, friends, and most of our family, we think we are filled with love.
- *But compared to the perimeter of God’s love, we haven’t even begun* to love.
F. The proof of God’s love.

“That He Gave.”

- True love gives.
  - God’s love was not just words, but it was also deeds in that He gave His Son on Calvary for our sins.
  - One can give and not love, but one cannot love and not give.
  - One of the first evidences of love in courtship is the giving of gifts.
  - The offering plate reveals our love for God more than our talk!

G. The price of God’s love.

“Gave his only begotten Son.”

- In the last point we saw that love gives; here we see how much love gives.
  - If you love much, you will give much.
  - God’s gift says no one has ever loved so much as God loved.

H. The prudence of God’s love.

“Gave His only begotten son.”

- True love is wise.
  - God gave us exactly what we needed the most.
  - No other gift was so needed, so profitable, so fitting.
  - Love is not blind and stupid.
  - Love gets the right gifts for the one who is loved.

I. The prerequisite of God’s love.

“Whosoever believeth in him.”
This is the prerequisite for benefitting from God’s love.

God’s love, though great and wonderful, will not benefit you unless you attend to this important prerequisite.

J. The protection in God’s love.

“Should not perish.”

Love protects the objects of its love.

1. First, the nature of the protection.

“Should not perish.”

- The protection spoken of here is spiritual protection.
- This is the protection we need the most.
- People are interested in protection—insurance companies prove that fact.
- But the protection they are interested in is physical or material not spiritual.

2. Second, the nobility of the protection.

“Should not.”

- This is protection which shall never end.
- There is no exception clause here.

3. It is Permanent Protection

- What a thrilling fact!
- God protects us forever once we receive His love gift.
- This protection will never expire.

K. The provision of God’s love.

“Should have everlasting life.”
• God’s love gives the loved one a great provision.

1. First, the excellence of the provision.

   “Everlasting life.”

   • This is the greatest gift anyone can have.
     • John 10:10 says,

   “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

   • This life is more abundant than anything the world can offer.
   • This is the greatest life of all.

2. Second, the eternality of the provision.

   “Everlasting.”

   • Many things which we buy in stores have warranties on them.
     • But the warranties are all limited.
     • Ninety days seems to be a popular limit on many items.
   
   • God warrants this gift of salvation, too.
     • It is forever.
     • No merchant can put that kind of warranty on their product.
     • But God can and did.
   
   “Everlasting” means once saved always saved.
   • Once you become a child of God, you cannot cease to be His child.
VI. The Insight From the Gospel (John 3:17–21)

- The last verses of this section of Scripture involving Nicodemus and Christ give us some insight that comes from the Gospel.
- We note five items spoken of in these last few verses which gives us some spiritual insight.

1. The coming of Christ.

   “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17).

   - The subject here is the Incarnation of Christ.

1. First, the Dispatcher of the coming.

   “God sent ... his Son into the world.”

   - In John 3:16 it is said God “gave” His son; here it is “sent.”
   - The word “gave” speaks of Christ’s coming in relationship to man, and “sent” speaks of Christ’s coming in relationship to God the Father.
   - Christ repeatedly informed people that He was in the world because He was sent here by His heavenly Father.

2. Second, the design of the coming. (16)

   “Not ... to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

   - The design of God in sending Christ into the world was the salvation of the soul of man.
   - You will not get that truth proclaimed in many churches.
   - They will only say Christ is a great example, teacher, moralist, social worker and what all;
• but they do not tell you that He was sent into the world mainly to provide a way of salvation for sinful man.

B. The categories of men.

“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” (John 3:18).

• Many preachers put men into many categories.
  • But the Gospel puts men into only two categories.

1) First, the determiner of categories.

“But believeth … believeth not.”

• Faith in Jesus Christ or lack of it determines in which category you are.

2) Second, the nature or effect of the categories.

“No condemned … condemned already.”

• The two categories have to do with a person’s eternal standing before God.
  • Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will be condemned.
  • Those who believe in Christ will not be condemned.

3) The condemnation of mankind.

“This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

• Mankind is severely condemned in this text.
• Three significant reasons are given for this condemnation.

A. First, the favor shown to mankind.

“Light is come into the world.”

• This speaks of Jesus Christ coming into the world.
• No greater favor was ever given mankind than Jesus coming into the world to save sinners.
• Therefore, great is the condemnation of mankind, for mankind, in insisting on remaining lost despises the greatest Divine favor ever given man.

B. Second, the fondness of men for self & sinfulness.

“Men loved darkness rather than light.”

• Men love sin more than righteousness.
• The laws being made in our land reveal this preference of man.
• This fondness of evil is “because their deeds were evil.”

• Sin begets sin.
• When you do evil you will love evil not righteousness.
• But this fondness for evil greatly condemns mankind.

C. Third, the foulness of men.

“Our deeds were evil.”

• Man has lived a foul life because he has not lived according to God’s standards.
• This condemns man, too.

4) The character of the wicked.
• This text exposes what is really evil.
1. First, the animosity to the light.

“Every one that doeth evil hateth the light” (John 3:20).

- Evil men are not in love with Jesus Christ.
  - Some boast of their love for Christ but their evil life betrays their claim as false.
  - This animosity is related to the previous verse in the fact that “men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”
  - Those who love darkness certainly do not love the light.

2. Second, the avoidance of the light.

“Neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20).

- This explains a lot of absenteeism at church.

5) The contrast to righteousness.

- Wicked people are a dramatic contrast to the righteous.

1. First, the conduct in the contrast.

- The righteous “doeth truth” (John 3:21), but the wicked “doeth evil” (John 3:20).

20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.’”

- Those who follow Christ act better (more righteously) than those who don’t.

2. Second, the crowd in the contrast.

- “He” (John 3:21).
21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

- “He” is only one compared to “everyone” of John 3:20 that “doeth evil.”
- This reflects the fact that the righteous are greatly outnumbered by the unrighteous.
- The righteous’ crowd is small.

3. Third, the compassion in the contrast.

20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

- The righteous “cometh to the light” (John 3:21).
- The wicked “neither cometh to the light” (John 3:20).
- Where one goes shows one’s affection.
- Christ receivers love the light.
- So they love the Word, church, and holy things.

4. Fourth, the confirmation in the contrast.

- Righteous people come to the light that their “deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:21).
- Evil men avoid the light lest their “deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20).
- but good people seek the light for vindication of their character.
- The righteous do not come to the light to have an ego trip and secure praise for themselves - that is not what this verse means - rather, they come to the light that they may be approved of God.