SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

John

Chapter Three, Verses 1–36

You Must Be Born Again — a ruler at night, a serpent on a pole, and a friend who steps aside for the Bridegroom

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Nicodemus comes by night with compliments and leaves with a command no man can obey by himself; then Jesus points to a bronze serpent on a pole, the world God loved, and the Light men run from, while John the Baptist gladly hands his crowd to the Bridegroom. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind John's key words.

THE PASSAGE

John 3:1–36

born · lifted · loved · decrease · above

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Five movements from Nicodemus at night to the wrath that abides

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"He must increase, but I must decrease." — John 3:30

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

John 3:1–36

You Must Be Born Again — A teacher of Israel learns he must be born from above, and the Baptist rejoices to decrease

† How to Read This Study

This study walks John 3 in 5 movements, in John's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where John is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · 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."

† Before the Passage

John 2 ends at Passover in Jerusalem. Jesus has cleansed the temple, and "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 … for He Himself knew what was in man" (2:23–25). Chapter 3 opens with one of those men: "Now there was a man of the Pharisees." Sproul links the chapter to that closing note: Nicodemus is one of the men whose heart Jesus already knows, and the Lord who "knew what was in man" goes straight to what is missing in him.

Nicodemus is no small figure. He is a Pharisee, "a ruler of the Jews" (a member of the Sanhedrin), and Jesus calls him "the teacher of Israel" (v. 10). John will show him twice more: standing up for a fair hearing for Jesus in the council (7:50–51), and carrying "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight" to bury Him (19:39). The man who came by night ends in the open at the cross. Chapter 3 is the beginning of that road.

The Old Testament roots are close to the surface, and Jesus expects "the teacher of Israel" to know them. "Born of water and the Spirit" echoes Ezekiel 36:25–27 — "I will sprinkle clean water on you … I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" — and the valley of dry bones that follows (Ezekiel 37), where the same Hebrew word is breath, wind and Spirit. "Son of Man" comes from Daniel 7:13. And the bronze serpent of verse 14 is Numbers 21:4–9, where dying Israelites looked and lived.

Read the chapter in two halves. In verses 1–21 Jesus speaks to Nicodemus — new birth (1–8), the Son of Man lifted up (9–15), and God's love and the Light that judges (16–21). In verses 22–36 the scene moves to the Judean countryside and to "Aenon near Salim," where John the Baptist is still baptizing because he "had not yet been thrown into prison" (v. 24). His disciples complain that "all are coming to" Jesus; John answers with the joy of the friend of the bridegroom, and the chapter closes on the One "who comes from above" (vv. 31–36). It begins with a man who must be born from above and ends with the Son who came from above.

I
MOVEMENT

JOHN 3:1–8

Born from Above

A ruler comes by night with a compliment and is told he must begin again

> 1 *Now 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 have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."* 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."* 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?"* 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.* 6 *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* 7 *"Do not be amazed 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 do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*
>
> JOHN 3:1–8

> *"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."*
>
> EZEKIEL 36:25

> *"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."*
>
> EZEKIEL 36:26

ἄνωθεν

ANŌTHEN · "AGAIN / FROM ABOVE" · G509

The adverb means "from above," and by extension "from the beginning," "anew." It occurs thirteen times in the New Testament, five of them in John: 3:3 and 3:7 (born *anōthen*), 3:31 ("He who comes *from above* is above all"), 19:11 (authority given "from above") and 19:23 (the tunic woven "in one piece" from the top). Nicodemus hears only "again" and asks about a second trip into the womb (v. 4). John's own use in verse 31 shows the deeper sense: a birth that comes down from God. Guzik and Henry both hold that the word carries both meanings here — a new birth, and a birth from above.

πνεῦμα

PNEUMA · "WIND / SPIRIT" · G4151

The same word means breath, wind and spirit, and verse 8 plays on all of it: "The wind (*to pneuma*) blows where it wishes … so is everyone who is born of the Spirit (*tou pneumatos*)." Thayer cites John 3:8 as one of the few New Testament places where *pneuma* means the wind itself. "Sound" is *phōnē*, the word for a voice. You cannot command the wind or see it, but you can hear it and see what it moves. Ezekiel 37 makes the same play in Hebrew (*ruach*): breath, wind and Spirit enter the dry bones and they live.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik points out that Nicodemus had every outward mark of a man right with God, yet "By all outward appearance, he was already transformed unto God – yet he was not." Jesus overturned the belief that being born a Jew guaranteed the kingdom: "Jesus made it plain that a man's first birth does not assure him of the kingdom." *Anōthen* means both "again" and "from above." On "born of water" he lays out five readings — baptism, physical birth, the Word, the Spirit as living water, and the cleansing water of Ezekiel 36 — and gives the last "the most weight (though it is a tough call)." Either way, the new birth is God's work: "A man might wash himself; but he could never birth himself."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's June 2002 sermon "Rebirth" opens with a confession: "I find it is one of the most difficult texts in the New Testament to deal with adequately." He takes Nicodemus's greeting as sound theology — signs do authenticate God's messengers — and still Jesus answers with a necessary condition. Regeneration is what makes a Christian, so the phrase "born-again Christian" is redundant: "There is no such thing as a non-born-again Christian or an unregenerate Christian." He admits he is not sure what the water means, reads it through Ezekiel's cleansing and dry bones, and thinks a baptism reading less likely. Heritage saves no one — "No one was born a Christian" — and "You cannot make yourself reborn any more than Lazarus could have brought himself out of the tomb."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's 1857 sermon "Regeneration" calls the new birth "the hinge of the gospel" and warns the church-goer that "the name of a Christian is not the nature of a Christian." He refuses two counterfeits: baptismal regeneration and self-reformation. The real thing is the Holy Spirit working "in a supernatural manner": "There must be a divine operation; call it a miraculous operation, if you please." And it goes to the root: "The change is radical; it gives us new natures, makes us love what we hated and hate what we loved." An unregenerate man would not even enjoy heaven, he argues; and since death fixes a man's state, delay is folly.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry is gentle with the night visit: “Though he came by night, Christ bade him welcome, accepted his integrity, and pardoned his infirmity.” To be born again is “to begin anew, as those that have hitherto lived either much amiss or to little purpose,” and he reads the birth as both new and from above. The water is the Spirit’s own work: “of the Spirit working like water,” cleansing and cooling. “Regeneration is absolutely necessary to our happiness here and hereafter.” Like the wind, the Spirit “works arbitrarily, and as a free agent,” and his work is known by its fruit — “though its causes are hidden, its effects are manifest.”

II
MOVEMENT

JOHN 3:9-15

As Moses Lifted Up the Serpent

The teacher of Israel is pointed to a pole in the wilderness

9 *Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?”* 10 *Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you* ⚠ *the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?* 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.* 12 *“If I told you earthly things and you do not* ⟲ *believe, how will you* ⟲ *believe if I tell you heavenly things?* 13 *“No one has ascended into heaven, but* △ *He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.* 14 *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,* △ *even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;* 15 *so that whoever* ⟲ *believes will in Him have eternal life.*

JOHN 3:9-15

“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.””

NUMBERS 21:8

FIGURE · THE BRONZE SERPENT AND THE SON OF MAN

JOHN 3:14–15	NUMBERS 21:4–9	THE SON OF MAN
THE DANGER	**bitten by fiery serpents;** many died (Num 21:6)	**perishing in sin;** "shall not perish" (v16)
THE REMEDY	**a bronze serpent, made** at God's command (21:8)	**the Son of Man,** given by God (v16)
LIFTED UP	**set on a standard** where all could see (21:9)	**lifted up on a cross** (v14; 12:32–33)
THE RESPONSE	**look at it** (21:8)	**believe in Him** (v15)
THE RESULT	**"he lived"** (21:9)	**"eternal life"** (v15)

Read across each row: Jesus takes Numbers 21 point by point — the danger, the remedy God provided, the lifting up, the look of faith, and life.

Ὑψόω

HYPSOŌ · "LIFT UP" · G5312

To raise high, and so to exalt. It occurs twenty times in the New Testament; in John it is always the Son of Man being "lifted up" — 3:14 (twice: Moses lifted, the Son must be lifted), 8:28, 12:32 and 12:34. John explains it himself at 12:33: "He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die." Sproul and Guzik both read the lifting first as the cross; Guzik adds that the exaltation follows from it. The glory and the gallows are one movement.

δεῖ

DEI · "IT IS NECESSARY, MUST" · G1163

A small verb of necessity, used 104 times in the New Testament. John 3 uses it three times — "You must be born again" (v. 7), "so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (v. 14), "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30) — and John 4 picks it up at once: "He had to pass through Samaria" (4:4) and "those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (4:24). The cross is not an accident in this Gospel; it is a divine *must*, as Maclaren put it in Guzik's notes: "He *must* die because He *would* save."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads the bronze serpent carefully. "Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible," and bronze speaks of judgment — "So, a bronze serpent does speak of sin, but of sin judged." Jesus is the sin-bearer who stays sinless: "Even though Jesus bore our sins, He never became a sinner." The Israelites did nothing but look: "The people were saved not by doing anything, but by simply looking to the bronze serpent," and he ties that to Isaiah 45:22. "Lifted up" means both the cross and the exaltation that followed. Believing, he says, is receiving rather than achieving, and eternal life is a new quality of life, not only a longer one.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "The Son of Man Must Be Lifted Up" (30 June 2002) Sproul hears "Son of Man" as Daniel's heavenly figure, the One who alone has come down. He presses Numbers 21: Israel was judged for complaining, "bent on perishing," and God provided one remedy on a pole. "The implication of the text is that some looked and some did not." "Lifted up," for Sproul, is first the cross: "He must be lifted up upon a cross; He must be the substitute serpent, if you will." He notices that verse 15's promise comes in the negative first — not perish — because the people in the wilderness were dying.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent" (1857) paints the camp of Israel as a picture of men in sin, and the serpent of brass as "the type of Jesus Christ crucified." "The remedy for sinners is Christ crucified," and it was meant to be seen: "Now, Jesus hung on the cross on purpose to be looked at." So the preacher has one job — "our business is to lift up Christ Jesus and to preach him fully" — and the sinner one: "all you have to do is to look." He guards both sides of the truth: "Though the reception of the gospel be all of grace, yet the rejection of it is all of man."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry rebukes, through Nicodemus, those "who undertake to teach others and yet are ignorant and unskilful in the word of righteousness themselves." Then he walks through the type: the deadly bite, the brass serpent "lifted up upon a pole, and so must the Son of man be lifted up; thus it behoved him," and the public remedy — "The serpent was lifted up that all the thousands of Israel might see it." The bitten Israelite looked and lived; the sinner who believes on Christ shall not perish, but have eternal life.

III
MOVEMENT

JOHN 3:16-21

God So Loved the World

The gift of the only begotten Son — and the Light that men flee

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.* 17 *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* 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.* 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.* 20 *"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.* 21 *"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."*

JOHN 3:16-21

FIGURE · TWO RESPONSES TO THE LIGHT



The Light comes to save, not to judge; the two columns show where a man stands, now and finally, by what he does with the Son.

μονογενής

MONOGENĒS · "ONLY BEGOTTEN, UNIQUE" · G3439

"Only-born," one of a kind. Nine New Testament uses: three times in Luke of an only child (7:12; 8:42; 9:38), four times in John of the Son (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18), once of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17 — Abraham's "only begotten son" though Ishmael lived), and once in 1 John 4:9. The word stresses uniqueness of relation: there is no other Son like this one. That is why Genesis 22:2 stands behind verse 16 — "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love." The verse's "so" (*houtōs*) is "in this way": the measure of the love is the gift.

ἐλέγχω

ELENCHŌ · "EXPOSE, CONVICT" · G1651

To bring to light so as to convict — the word of a cross-examiner. Seventeen New Testament uses; in John only three: 3:20 (the evildoer avoids the Light "for fear that his deeds will be exposed"), 8:46 ("Which one of you convicts Me of sin?") and 16:8 (the Spirit "will convict the world concerning sin"). Light does not merely show the way; it shows the man. That is why the darkness runs. Verse 21 sets the opposite: deeds "manifested" (*phanerōthē*) as wrought in God.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik calls verse 16 the gospel in summary and sets out its "Seven Wonders." He stresses that the love came first: "God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world." Many Jews of the time assumed God loved only Israel, so "the world" was startling. Yet love must be received: "God loves the world, but the world does not receive or benefit from that love until it believes in Jesus." Believing means trust and reliance, not bare agreement. On verses 19–20 he is blunt about why people turn away: "It is far more often true that there is a moral compromise at the root of their rejection." Those who never heard are judged by the light they had (Romans 1:18–21).

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul notes that "Usually, commentators see John 3:16 as an editorial comment made by John," the evangelist reflecting on what Jesus has just said. He rejects any universalist reading: the love of verse 16 is shown in one particular gift, "God has one Son," and the narrowness of the gospel is part of its love — "He does not love the world enough to say you can ignore the only One." Unbelievers are condemned already, and the reason is our nature: "We are by nature children of darkness." "We are in the darkness, and there is nothing that terrifies us more than the appearance of light."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In "Immeasurable Love" (1885) Spurgeon traces the love to God Himself: "He loves because it is his nature to do so," and sin only sets it off — "The black background of sin makes the bright line of love shine out the more clearly." The gift was costly and is free: "Nothing is freer than a gift." Faith is the plan, and small faith counts: "Faith, however slender, saves the soul." The word "whosoever" draws the line: "Here is the compass of the love: while every unbeliever is excluded, every believer is included." And "shall not perish" means the believer will be kept believing to the end.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry dwells on the size of the love: "God so loved the world, so really, so richly." God sent His Son to save, not to condemn, and believers are not condemned. Unbelievers "are as sure to be condemned in the judgment of the great day as if they were condemned already." The cause is not lack of light but love of sin: "It is the unspeakable folly of the most of men that they loved darkness rather than light," and "Christ is hated because sin is loved." The man who does the truth comes to the light.

IV
MOVEMENT

JOHN 3:22–30

He Must Increase

The friend of the Bridegroom loses his crowd and finds his joy full

22 *After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with*
them and baptizing. 23 *John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and*
people were coming and were being baptized— 24 *for John had not yet been thrown into prison.* 25 *Therefore there*
arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. 26 *And they came to John and said*
to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and
all are coming to Him." 27 *John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him*
from heaven. 28 *"You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of*
Him.' 29 *"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him,*
rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. 30 *"He must increase,*
but I must decrease.

JOHN 3:22–30

> *"For as a young man marries a virgin, So your sons will marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you."*
>
> ISAIAH 62:5

FIGURE · THE FOUR "MUSTS" OF JOHN 3

THE FOUR "MUSTS" OF JOHN 3 · ONE GREEK WORD, DEI

THE SINNER'S MUST John 3:7	THE SAVIOR'S MUST John 3:14	THE SOVEREIGN'S MUST John 3:30	THE SERVANT'S MUST John 3:30
"You must be born again." No one can see the kingdom without it	*"so must the Son of Man be lifted up"* The cross is not an accident	*"He must increase"* Christ's kingdom keeps growing	*"but I must decrease"* The friend steps aside — and rejoices

The same word returns in 4:4 — "He *had to* pass through Samaria" —

Guzik's four labels: the sinner's, the Savior's, the sovereign's and the servant's must.

One small Greek word, dei, carries the whole chapter: what the sinner must undergo, what the Savior must suffer, and what the servant must gladly become.

νυμφίος

NYMPHIOS · "BRIDEGROOM" · G3566

Sixteen New Testament uses; in John four — once at the Cana wedding (2:9) and three times in 3:29. The prophets pictured the LORD as Israel's husband and bridegroom (Isaiah 54:5; 62:5; Hosea 2:19–20); John the Baptist quietly hands that title to Jesus. The "friend of the bridegroom" (*ho philos tou nymphiou*) was the groomsman who arranged the match and the feast, then stepped back. His joy was to hear the groom's voice. Verse 29's "made full" (*peplērōtai*) is perfect tense: John's joy stands complete.

δεῖ … αὐξάνειν … ἐλαττοῦσθαι

DEI … AUXANEIN … ELATTOUSTHAI · "MUST … INCREASE … DECREASE" · G1163

The same *dei* of verses 7 and 14. *Auxanō* is the word for growing crops and growing children; *elattoō* is to be made less. Both are present infinitives — an ongoing process, not a single moment of humility. John does not say "He may increase if I allow it"; he says it is necessary. The servant's shrinking is as much God's plan as the Son's rising, and John calls it joy.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes how the disciples' complaint tempted John to rivalry, and how he refused it: John would not let envy or the fickle crowd make him forget his mission. His answer begins with gift — a man receives only what heaven gives — and ends with joy: "John was happy because he lost his congregation to Jesus." The friend of the bridegroom, he explains, has a supporting role: "He isn't to be the focus of attention, but to supervise the bringing of two people together." At the close of the chapter he gathers its four "musts": the sinner's, the Savior's, the sovereign's and the servant's.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "Jesus & John the Baptist" (21 July 2002) Sproul sees John's disciples fishing for jealousy and John refusing to bite, accepting his place as a gift from heaven. That is no small thing, he says: "Contentment is not natural for fallen people." John's calling was to prepare the way, so he rejoices to be eclipsed. Sproul draws the line from Israel as God's bride to the church as Christ's, putting John's words this way: "The bride isn't mine; the bride is His." "He must increase" is not John's strategy but a divine necessity, because Christ is from heaven and John is from the earth.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry notes that John's disciples were jealous for their master's honour, and that John answered with humility: "The more others magnify us, the more we must humble ourselves." A man can receive only what is given from heaven, and every minister is a helper of another's joy: "Faithful ministers are friends of the bridegroom, to recommend him to the affections and choice of the children of men." John is content to fade, because "The kingdom of Christ is, and will be, a growing kingdom."

V
MOVEMENT

JOHN 3:31–36

He Who Comes from Above

The Son speaks the words of God — life for the one who believes, wrath on the one who will not obey

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.* 32 *"What He has seen and heard, of that He* ↻ *testifies; and no one receives His* ↻ *testimony.* 33 *"He who has received His* ↻ *testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.* 34 *"For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for* △ *He gives the Spirit without measure.* 35 *"* △ *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.* 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."*

JOHN 3:31–36

ὀργή
ORGĒ · "WRATH" · G3709

Not a flash of temper (*thymos*) but settled, steady opposition — God's fixed judgment against sin. Thirty-six New Testament uses, and this is the only time John's Gospel uses it. It "abides" (*menei*, present tense): it is not only coming, it remains on the unbeliever now. John's favorite word for the believer abiding in Christ (15:4–10) here describes wrath abiding on the one outside Him. Guzik reads it as God's settled displeasure with sin, not an outburst.

ἀπειθέω

APEITHEŌ · "DOES NOT OBEY" · G544

To refuse to be persuaded, and so to disobey. Fourteen New Testament uses; only here in John. The verse sets "believes" (*pisteuōn*) against "does not obey" (*apeithōn*) — not "does not believe," as the KJV renders it. In John's thinking unbelief is not a lack of information but a refusal; faith and obedience are two sides of one response to the Son. Note also verse 34's "without measure" (*ou … ek metrou*): the Spirit given to the Son is not rationed.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that scholars debate whether verses 31–36 are still the Baptist speaking or John the evangelist reflecting; either way, the point is the supremacy of the Son. "Jesus is not only different from everyone else; Jesus is also greater than everyone else." Few receive His testimony, yet those who do set their seal that God is true. With Morris he reads the wrath as God's settled displeasure against sin, not a temper, and he sums up the choice in one line: "To reject the Son is to reject His gift – eternal life."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's sermon closes the chapter on the One from above: because He comes from heaven He speaks the very words of God, and God gives Him the Spirit without limit. Then he turns to verse 35 and finds the ground of our salvation there: "the ground of His love for us is the love that He has from eternity for His Son." Our election and adoption are "in the Son." He sends his congregation to the Lord's Supper, which looks back to the cross and forward to the marriage feast of the Lamb.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verse 36 as "The Unbeliever's Unhappy Condition" (1871). The unbeliever may be moral, religious and orthodox, and still the wrath abides. Unbelief is no small fault: it refuses God's gift and dishonors Father, Son and Spirit. He warns that terror alone saves no one — "the wrath of God never softened anybody's heart yet" — and that there is one way in: "There is but one door, and if you close it by your unbelief, how can you enter heaven?" So he ends with the door open: "Trust Jesus now. In your present position it may be done."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry rests the certainty of Christ's teaching on His origin: He testifies only to what He has seen and heard. He grieves that few receive it, and says those who do set their seal that God is true. The Son has the Spirit in full: "The Spirit was not in Christ as in a vessel, but as in a fountain, as in a bottomless ocean." The Father's love for the Son is not past but present — "not only he did love him, but he doth love him" — and He has put all things into His hand. Believers already have everlasting life begun.

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the pole in the wilderness to the new birth the apostles preached

> *"And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."*
>
> NUMBERS 21:9

> *"Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other."*
>
> ISAIAH 45:22

> *"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 and renewing by the Holy Spirit,"*
>
> TITUS 3:5

> *"for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God."*
>
> 1 PETER 1:23

> *"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 JOHN 4:9

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik weighs the "water" of verse 5 against Ezekiel 36:25–28 — clean water and a new spirit promised to Israel — and connects the look at the serpent with Isaiah 45:22: "Turn to Me and be saved."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul reads the new birth through Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones, where only God can make the dead live — the Old Testament truth a teacher of Israel should have known.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter. Guzik walks the text and lays out the options fairly; Sproul presses the doctrine — regeneration before faith, substitution, the exclusivity of Christ; Spurgeon pleads with the hearer to look and live; Henry gathers it into Puritan counsel. All four are Reformed or close to it on the new birth, so read their agreement as a tradition's voice. No Spurgeon sermon on vv. 22–30 was sourced for this study.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Born from above	A man might wash himself but never birth himself; water likely Ezekiel 36.	Not sure of the water; no unregenerate Christians; Lazarus cannot raise himself.	The hinge of the gospel; not baptism, not reform — a radical new nature.	Welcomed though he came by night; the Spirit works like water and wind.
II · The serpent	Sin judged, not a sinner; saved by simply looking.	The substitute serpent; some looked and some did not.	Christ hung on purpose to be looked at; preach Him plainly.	Lifted on a pole that all Israel might see it.
III · God so loved	Love came first; moral compromise lies behind most unbelief.	Likely John's comment; one Son, no other way; we fear the light.	Love is God's nature; whosoever includes every believer.	So really, so richly; Christ hated because sin is loved.
IV · He must increase	Happy to lose his congregation to Jesus; the four musts.	Contentment is not natural; the bride isn't mine, she is His.	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	The more others magnify us, the more we humble ourselves.
V · From above	Different and greater; to reject the Son is to reject life.	God loves us in the Son; the Supper looks back and forward.	Wrath never softened a heart; one door — trust Jesus now.	The Spirit in Christ as in a fountain, a bottomless ocean.

JOHN 3:1–36 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The chapter begins after a warning.** John 2:23–25 says Jesus did not entrust Himself to people impressed by signs, "for He Himself knew what was in man." Nicodemus is impressed by signs (3:2) — and Jesus goes straight past the compliment to the heart. THE TEXT
- **"Again" and "from above" are one word.** *Anōthen* (G509) means both. Nicodemus hears "a second time"; John's own use in 3:31 shows a birth that comes down from God. THE GREEK
- **You cannot birth yourself.** Guzik: "A man might wash himself; but he could never birth himself." Sproul: "You cannot make yourself reborn any more than Lazarus could have brought himself out of the tomb." GUZIK
- **The water is probably Ezekiel's water.** Guzik gives Ezekiel 36 "the most weight (though it is a tough call)"; Sproul admits he is unsure and leans the same way; Henry reads it as the Spirit working like water. None of the four makes it baptismal regeneration. THE TEXT
- **Saved by a look.** Israel did nothing but look at the serpent and live. Spurgeon: "Now, Jesus hung on the cross on purpose to be looked at." SPURGEON
- **The cross is a divine "must."** The same *dei* runs through 3:7, 3:14 and 3:30 — the sinner must be born again, the Son must be lifted up, He must increase. THE GREEK

- **Love came before we turned.** Guzik: "God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world." The measure of the love is the gift — "His only begotten Son." GUZIK
- **Men run from the Light because it exposes.** *Elenchō* (3:20) is a cross-examiner's word. Sproul: "there is nothing that terrifies us more than the appearance of light." Henry: "Christ is hated because sin is loved." SPROUL
- **Joy in decreasing.** John's joy is "made full" when his crowd goes to Jesus. Guzik: "John was happy because he lost his congregation to Jesus." GUZIK
- **Wrath abides — and so does life.** Verse 36 sets "has eternal life" (present) beside "the wrath of God abides" (present). The verdict is not only future; it is now, and it turns on the Son. THE TEXT

† Questions for the Table

1 **Nicodemus had religion, position and reputation, and still had to be born again. What have I trusted in that cannot give me new birth?**

A man's first birth does not assure him of the kingdom (Guzik).

3:1-7; Titus 3:5

2 **Where have I seen the "wind" of the Spirit at work in a man I know — not the wind itself, but what it moved?**

You hear its sound; you see its effects.

3:8; Ezek 37:9-10

3 **The bitten Israelites only had to look. What am I still trying to do, instead of looking to Christ lifted up?**

All you have to do is to look (Spurgeon).

3:14-15; Num 21:8-9

4 **Is there a part of my life I keep out of the Light "for fear that [my] deeds will be exposed"? What would it take to bring it in?**

The Light comes to save before it judges (v17).

3:19-21; 1 John 1:7

5 **Where am I competing for credit or attention in ministry, at home or at work? What would "I must decrease" look like this week?**

The friend of the bridegroom rejoices at the Groom's voice.

3:27-30

6 **Verse 36 says the believer has eternal life now. How would I live differently today if I believed that is already true of me?**

Present tense: has life; present tense: wrath abides.

3:36; 5:24

John 3 begins with a respected man who knew a great deal and needed to be born from above, and it ends with the Son who came from above with the words of God. In between stands a pole in the wilderness. Look to Him lifted up, and live — and then, like John, let Him increase.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

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