

JOHN

Chapter 3

You Must be Born Again

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 are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered 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? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 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 its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

3:1-21 John 3:1-21 comprises the well-known conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. It has rightly been said that John 3:1-21 contains the whole of Christ's teaching. If we had nothing except these twenty one verses, we would know the way of salvation. Ylvisaker divides these verses thus: In verses 1-10 we have a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Verses 11-21, beginning with "verily, verily" (the second in this Gospel, the first at 1:51), we have a discourse by Jesus: (Buls)

1. Verses 11-13, Who Jesus is;
2. Verses 14-17, What He has come to accomplish;
3. Verses 18-21, What the result of His coming will be to men.

Note that the Nestle/Aland Greek text begins verse 14 as a subparagraph. They do this because there are those who consider verses 14-21 an exposition by the Evangelist John, not the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus. We do not agree with this idea. With Ylvisaker, Stoeckhardt, Kretzmann, Hendriksen and Lenski we maintain that Jesus spoke the words, recorded in verses 14-21, to Nicodemus. (Buls)

Nicodemus is again mentioned at John 7:50-52 and 19:39-42. His bold actions on both occasions are a reflection of John 3:21, an argument in favor of considering verses 14-21 as the words of Jesus to Nicodemus on this occasion. Did Nicodemus become a child of God on this occasion? (Buls)

Fahling says: Nicodemus came seeking and left believing. (Buls)

Stoekhardt: As one born again, as a believing disciple of Jesus, Nicodemus leaves. Where we find him again in the Gospel accounts, he appears as a disciple of the Lord. (Buls)

Lenski: What did Nicodemus say or think? John is not making this a story about this man but a report of the testimony of Jesus to himself. . . We may well say, however, that Jesus' words must have made an indelible impression upon the old Pharisee and must have shaken him profoundly. In due time he came to faith. (Buls)

Bengel: Even Nicodemus subsequently acted more openly. (Buls)

Evidently he is referring to John 7:50-52 and 19:39-42, and is implying that Nicodemus became a child of God. (Buls)

3:1-17 Read carefully John 1–2, giving special attention to 1:9–14, which describes the new birth of faith in Christ that makes us children of God. John 4 offers a specific example of the Good News coming to an individual in the non-Israelite world. The Samaritan woman, in turn, told the Good News, and many others believed (Jn 4:39). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

John's chronology isn't linear, making it difficult to determine when this meeting took place. A fair bit of evidence must have accumulated, since Nicodemus spoke glowingly of Jesus doing "these signs," while evidently he'd discussed the events with others, since he told the Lord, "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (v 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:1 *a man of the Pharisees*. Although both the Pharisees and "the Jews" are frequent antagonists and often targets of Jesus' barbs, here we meet one of the rulers—a member of the Sanhedrin—whom John presents in a more favorable light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

"Now" has been explained in two ways: (Buls)

1. Nicodemus is an example of the people mentioned in 2:23-25, people with a weak, milk-faith;
2. Nicodemus is different from those people.

If the former is correct "now" means "now" in the narrative sense. If the latter is correct, it means "but." Both explanations have been suggested by eminent exegetes. We shall not try to solve this, nor need we. But it is very clear that Nicodemus is not yet a Christian. (Buls)

"Of" occurs approximately 160 times in John's Gospel and has a variety of meanings. Here it tells us that he was a member of the Pharisaic party. (Buls)

"Nicodemus" is a Greek name. During the Hellenistic period many Jews were given Greek names. (Buls)

The Jewish ruling council is also called the Sanhedrin. (Buls)

Nicodemus is mentioned only here and again in John 7:50 and John 19:39. The last reference clearly indicates that he became a Christian. (Buls)

Verses 1-10 constitute a dialog. Verses 11-21 constitute a monolog. John gives us eleven conversations of Jesus in full detail. (Buls)

Their general view was that prophets were rare or had vanished. (TLSB)

For more on Nicodemus see Jn 7:50–52; 19:39–41. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

John's use of "Jews" is not racial but theological. It refers to those who are opposed to Jesus' Gospel. Nicodemus is an exception. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

As a Pharisee and ruler, he undoubtedly knew the OT well. (PBC)

Nicodemus, a ruler. Member of the Council who later spoke on Jesus' behalf and participated in providing Jesus an honorable burial. (TLSB)

Nicodemus was a good Pharisee and that he in common with all Pharisees relied upon himself. He practiced righteousness outwardly and believed that his own achievements were in themselves a sufficiency. (Yilvisaker)

Luke 18:18-30, "¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." ²⁸ Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" ²⁹ "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

3:2 by night. Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid to come by day. Or he may have wanted a long talk, which would have been difficult in the daytime with the crowds around Jesus. (CSB)

So that his colleagues would not know. John's presentation of this encounter may symbolize those in the world who come out of evil darkness to Jesus, the light of the world (cf.3:19-21). (TLSB)

We do not know precisely at what time this happened. Why did he come at night? His secret visit was probably because he feared he would be exposed to the ridicule and hatred of his fellows, or because he thought himself too eminent a person to compromise his dignity by making this visit in public. (Buls)

Stoekhardt: He was ashamed of this visit to Jesus before his colleagues. (Buls)

Hendriksen: We just do not know. (Buls)

Opinions vary as to why Nicodemus comes “by night.” Is it the only time both are free? Is it fear of the council? Could John be drawing attention back to the previous light and dark comparisons (1:1–18)? The simplest explanation is probably best, but perhaps John also points out the darkness to note subtly that while Nicodemus believes in much that Jesus is doing, he isn’t a believer in Jesus as Messiah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Therefore, we have no idea of the sincerity of Nicodemus’s greeting or whom he considers like-minded in this assessment of Jesus. In most other instances in the Gospels, when Jewish leaders said, “We know,” it preceded a challenge to his authority or teaching, sometimes done with flattery, sometimes antagonism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Others came to Jesus with similar words in apparent attempts to flatter him into letting down his guard (Lk 20:19). In contrast, Nicodemus seems sincere. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

Rabbi – This was an official title of honor and a Jewish term for teacher. At this point Nicodemus may have been like many people today who recognize Jesus as someone really great but miss the point that He is the Son of God and the only Savior from sin.

Hendriksen: We just do not know. (Buls)

Nicodemus does not see Jesus as Savior, but merely as teacher. He bases this belief on the signs. For "these signs" see 2:23. There are many unrecorded signs in John's Gospel. Nicodemus implies that God not only accompanied the signs, but was the source of help and power. Nicodemus is not confessing Jesus' divinity in this verse. He thinks of Him as a prophet. Similar to Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament who performed miracles also, but only with the help of God. (Buls)

“Rabbi” was the Jewish term for “teacher” (1:38). “We know”: he speaks for himself and his associates. Read Ezra 7:1–10 for an example of one among many who fit the description of “a teacher who has come from God.” “Miraculous signs,” *sēmeia*: see 2:11, 23; 4:48; 6:2; etc. Martin Franzmann (*Concordia Bible with Notes: New Testament* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1971] 171) comments, “Believing is more than seeing signs and being somehow drawn to him who performs them. . . . the stance of the sympathetic spectator is not the stance of faith (2:23–25). Believing is more than a good man’s sincere religious interest in Jesus . . . Jesus’ brusque disregard of Nicodemus’ compliment makes that plain.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

teacher – *didaskalos* – A master teacher like one possessing a doctor degree.

As an interested and conscientious teacher, Nicodemus wanted the latest and best information available about God. Jesus appeared to be the one who had it. (PBC)

no one can do these signs. Cf 2:23. For Nicodemus, these signs were legitimate indications of God’s presence. (TLSB)

3:3-6 Nicodemus probably was in agreement with the Jews who saw themselves as children of Abraham and therefore part of God’s kingdom simply because they were biologically descended

from Abraham. To the contrary, Jesus says, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:3-4 Note just how incongruent Jesus’ reply is compared to v 2. The Lord appears to have heard something completely different from what Nicodemus said. Nicodemus praises him as teacher and doer of signs; Jesus replies by speaking of being born into the kingdom of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Nicodemus, a son of Abraham, born and circumcised into God’s covenant people, must assume that his place in the kingdom is secure. Now this charismatic rabbi is telling him that he must be “born again.” Or is Jesus intentionally talking past Nicodemus by using *anōthen*, which can mean either “again” or “from above”? Nicodemus obviously hangs on the former interpretation, and we can practically hear the incredulity—if not outright sarcasm—in his response. Note, too, how “a man” is the principal actor in Nicodemus’s idea of new birth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:3 *truly, truly I say to you* – Literally, “truly, truly” or “amen, amen.” (PBC)

Jesus is neither flattered nor does He "talk down" to Nicodemus. Three times Jesus says "I tell you the truth." (3,5,11) Two times Nicodemus says "how." (4,9) And Jesus adds another "how" in 12. Nicodemus' questions clearly show his utter lack of faith. Jesus' answers clearly show the utter necessity and truth of conversion, a work of God in man. (Buls)

"Again" has caused much discussion. It is found in John 3:3; John 3:31; John 19:11 and John 19:23. In the last three instances it must mean "from above." But does it mean that here? Eminent exegetes translate "from above." But the word as it is used in verse 4, clearly shows that the meaning is "again." Thus in most of our translations. (Buls)

see the kingdom of God – Like most Jews of his time, Nicodemus thought of the kingdom of God in political terms. He expected that one day God would send a revolutionary leader, who would inspire the Jews to throw out the Roman army of occupation. (LL)

“Can see” means “to experience.” (Buls)

“The Kingdom of God” here means the invisible church. The *Una Sancta*. Repentance is required for entrance into this kingdom (though the Gospel of John does not use this word). Lenski has a beautiful discussion at this point.

Note that we have negatives in both protasis and apodosis. If both be dropped it means: “If ever anyone is born again he is able to see the Kingdom of God. We make this observation to bring out the point that “anyone” is universal, not restrictive, “anyone, no matter who.” (Buls)

In John, this expression is used only here and in v. 5. Refers to the reign of God that came in the person of Jesus, on whom John focuses throughout. (TLSB)

“The kingdom of God” is used in John only in this text and 18:36; it deserves special attention. See also Rev 11:15;12:10. Events in the kingdom of God proceed, not by human will or decision, but by God’s will, in his way. The Gospel, received by faith, gives assurance that his will is gracious. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

born again. † The Greek also may mean “born from above” (see NIV text note). Both meanings are consistent with Jesus’ redeeming work, and no doubt both meanings are implied here and at v. 7. (CSB)

Born. Metaphor of salvation, favored by John. (TLSB)

again. Gk *anōthen*, “from above.” Nicodemus either misunderstood Jesus’ words, assuming human birth and effort, or began to play a word game by taking Jesus as literally as possible. But Jesus meant a spiritual rebirth that only God can effect from above. (TLSB)

Jesus use of grammar indicates there are no exceptions to what He is saying. (Buls)

Depending on the context, *anōthen* can signify “from above” (James 1:17), “from the beginning” (Lk 1:3), “for a long time” (Acts 26:5), or “again” (Gal4:9). Translators differ. Vulgate: *denuo*; Luther: *von neuem*; *KJV, TEV, NIV, GWN*: “again.” *NEB*: “over again.” Beck (1976), *JB, NRSV*: “from above.” Note that “again” here does not denote mere repetition, as Nicodemus mistakenly understood (v5). The new birth is another kind of event, different from natural and sin-corrupted generation (v 6). It can only be “from God,” by his grace alone (1:13; 6:44; 12:12–32; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

3:4 *a second time into his mother’s womb* – To Nicodemus, Jesus was talking in riddles. He could hardly mean that a person must undergo a second physical birth. Nicodemus seemed to have senses a deeper meaning, but what was it? (PBC)

Though Nicodemus is not yet a Christian he is not ashamed to ask questions. "Man" means "human being." Nicodemus uses the Greek word for physical rebirth, showing that is what he is thinking Jesus means. Jesus responds, in verse 5, with the same word. But Nicodemus uses "to be born" sequentially in verse 4, whereas Jesus inverts the order of the verbs but does not make them sequential. Both of Nicodemus' questions in verse 4 are preposterous. These questions show us how ridiculous conversion appears to human reason, left to its own resources. (Buls)

3:5-6 Jesus moves Nicodemus to see beyond earthly birth—even rebirth. He parallels v 3, substituting “born of water and the Spirit” for “born again/from above.” He wants Nicodemus to start seeing God as the author of salvation and starts developing his theme in what we might term “Third Article language.” Rebirth is birth from above; birth from above involves water and the Word. Flesh (*sarx*) generates fleshly things; the Spirit generates spiritual things. Therefore, no man can regenerate himself and become right before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:5 *kingdom of God.* To be born of God, from on high, is to be born of the Holy Spirit through God’s means: “by water and the Spirit.” Luther writes, “Here Christ also speaks of the Holy Spirit and teaches us to regard Baptism as a spiritual, yes, a Spirit-filled water, in which the Holy Spirit is present and active; in fact, the entire Holy Trinity is there. And thus the person who has been baptized is said to be born anew” (Luther’s Works 22:283–86). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

born of water and the Spirit. † A phrase understood in various ways: 1. It means much the same as “born of the Spirit” (v. 8; cf. Tit 3:5). 2. Water refers to baptism—that of Jesus and his disciples (v. 22; 4:1–2). (CSB)

Again Jesus speaks of a universal truth, no exceptions. When He says "I tell you the truth" it denotes Jesus' divine authority, attributed to His human nature. (Buls)

"Born of water and the Spirit." We note first of all: the preposition is not repeated after "and." Therefore "water and Spirit" are one indivisible unit. The water in baptism is not a mere symbol. Secondly, the only baptism known at this point in Jesus' earthly life was that of the Baptist. The Holy Spirit was bestowed in John's baptism. There is only one baptism, Titus 3:5. Thirdly, the effects of John's baptism and the baptism after Pentecost were the same. (Buls)

What were the differences? First, John's baptism was for Israel only, see John 1:31. Secondly, John's baptism was given at the end of the Old Covenant. The apostolic baptism (Matthew 28:19) was given at the beginning of the New Covenant and is for all nations. Thirdly, there are those who say that the words "of water" are not important because Jesus does not use them at the end of verse 8. Dropping the word "water and" in verse 5 is supported by no Greek Manuscript evidence. (Buls)

The commentaries will demonstrate the opposing views of the Reformed and Lutheran on the efficacy of water-baptism. (Buls)

Who can understand conversion? That's what Jesus will say in verse 8. (Buls)

This is an elaboration on v. 3. The preposition "of" (Greek ek) governs both nouns. "Water" and "Spirit" therefore belong together and point to Christian baptism. Augustine: "We are born spiritually then, and in spirit we are born by the word and sacrament" (NPNF1 7:82). "IN the first place, we take up Baptism, by which we are first received into the Christian Church" (LC IV 2). "Reason and free will are able to live an outwardly decent life to a certain extent. But only the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born anew (John 3:5) and to have inwardly another heart, mind, and natural desire" (FC SD II 26). (TLSB)

3:6 flesh – On *sarx* in John see 1:13,14; 6:63; 8:15. Luther: "With reference to this, Christ says that the physical birth remains physical and produces physical life and nothing more, and that in and of himself man is nothing but flesh" (Luther's Works 22:268). cf. Mt 3:9. Keep in mind, though, that physical birth, too, is from God (Ps 139:13; Luther's explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism). But sin and death, piggy-backing on natural generation as the deadly AIDS virus does on healthy cells, "spread to all men" (Rom 5:12; Ps 51:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Human nature as it derives from natural, physical birth (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

Notice the beautiful symmetry in this compound sentence. "Gives birth to" is common to both parts. In Greek the perfect participles are used as nouns and denote existing state. (Buls)

The first sentence denotes physical birth, "of the flesh." The word "flesh" denotes fallen human nature, totally devoid of goodness or righteousness. The two occurrences of "flesh" are identical in meaning. (Buls)

"But" or "and likewise." (Buls)

Spirit is spirit. Spiritual life comes only by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

The two occurrences of "spirit" are not identical in meaning. The first means "Holy Spirit" but the second means simply "spirit." (Buls)

Baptism, a means of grace, causes a person to be spiritual, forgiven, reconciled to God, a member of the *Una Sancta* through Jesus Christ. (Buls)

All of us alike come into this world outside of God's kingdom. Contrary to what some teach, infants begin their lives under sin's condemnation. As Job once said of our physical birth, "Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!" (14:4). And Paul's years later said, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]" (Romans 7:18). We can only conclude with David, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). (PBC)

3:7-8 Jesus comes back to that sticking point of *anōthen*, pointing out that the work of the Holy Spirit in creating saving faith happens where God pleases, without the invitation or consent of man. These verses, together with vv 11–12, tie nicely with Article V of the Augsburg Confession, wherein we confess that "through the Word and Sacraments, . . . the Holy Ghost is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news" (AC V 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:7-8 A birth never happens apart from other people. In physical birth there is always at least a mother giving birth and a child being born. Usually there is also a father or family, a community of people in town, at work, at church. There is also a nation of which the child is a citizen. The newborn belongs to the family, the community, and the nation into which he is born. In spiritual birth there is a congregation, the whole Body of Christ, and the triune God. The newly baptized belongs in that congregation, belongs to the Body of Christ, belongs to God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:7 *You*. This assertion applies to everyone, not just Nicodemus. (CSB)

must. There are no exceptions. (CSB)

The participle beginning this verse in Greek introduces a prohibition. Again, Jesus is saying something that pertains at all times to all human beings. Note that Jesus speaks forthrightly but lovingly without the niceties of such words as "please." (Buls)

"You must" here and in verse 14, does not denote compulsion, but necessity in the sense that God wills conversion and also that man is totally unable to help himself. The "born" is passive in verse 6. But physical birth and conversion are passive experiences. "You" is plural, it refers not only to the Jews but also to all people. Here "again" means "again." (Buls)

This *dei* is not the "must" of moralistic, didactic admonition, but the Gospel-motivated "it is necessary" of Jn 9:4. There is no other way into the kingdom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

born again – Jesus made one imperceptible change in His words here. When He said, "You must be born again," He use the Greek plural "you." Clearly He was not speaking only about Nicodemus. "You" in the plural fits all people. (PBC) (CSB)

3:8 *wind*. No human being can understand, govern, or control the wind's movement. Jesus urged Nicodemus to discard his narrowly naturalistic view of human beings, as well as any presumption that they produce new birth. The new birth is an act of God (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

† The work of the Holy Spirit is beyond human comprehension (v. 9). He works as he pleases in the rebirth of believers. (CSB)

The first part of this verse is an axiom. All people understand it. We can observe the fact that there is wind, that it blows and that it makes a sound. This is inherent knowledge. (Buls)

Jesus is pointedly telling Nicodemus: "You're an educated man but cannot explain this physical phenomenon." Of course, it's true of all men, even the most educated meteorologist. They observe the movements of clouds and winds but what Jesus says here is still true and will be so until the end of time. (Buls)

"In the same way." In what same way? Grammar requires that we say that Jesus is not speaking on the Holy Spirit himself, but the *person* who is born of the Spirit. Regeneration yields observable evidence. It shows in the life of the converted person. But regeneration itself is a deep mystery. It is God's work in its entirety, including faith. (Buls)

Here the Reformed exegetes make a point that "water" is omitted here in some manuscripts. But there is more manuscript evidence for including "water" than for eliminating it. They say it is only the Spirit that is important. In this way the Reformed attempt to deny that baptism is a true means of grace. Compare what Luther says in the Small Catechism. (Buls)

Like *anōthen* (v 3) and many other words in John, *pneuma* is capable of different meanings in different contexts. Here it refers first to "wind," then to "the Spirit." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

We can understand the working of God's Spirit as little as we can predict the wind blowing on us. We know when it blows, and it affects us. But we can't see it. We can't be certain when or from what angle it will come. (PBC)

3:9-13 Jesus makes the point that one cannot teach what one does not know. Jesus knows because of what he has seen. His worldview is not confined to an earthly point of view. His worldview is from the heavenly point of view, which sees the kingdom of God for what it is and knows how we can enter it. His word is to be trusted. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:9 *how can these things be* – The reason that natural man cannot comprehend this is answered in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Nicodemus' question truly reveals his spiritual ignorance, but let us not be fast to condemn him. Must we not admit that we often ask the same and similar questions? Nicodemus was a Pharisee, but a friendly and honest one. But friendliness and honesty cannot convert anyone. (Buls)

The old expression "You can teach them but you can't learn them" comes to mind here. Stanza 2 of the hymn "These Things Did Thomas Count as Real" (LSB 472) parallels the situation the Lord

faces with Nicodemus, whose own skepticism blinds him to the truth of Jesus' words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

This new query reveals not only that Nicodemus has as yet experienced no effect of the Spirit in his own heart, but likewise that he has no understanding concerning the many passages in Scripture which deal with is matter. The deplorable fault in Nicodemus was that he must satisfy his reason in all things and he desires an answer to every "why." (Yilvisaker)

3:10 Nicodemus professed to know—surprisingly—what he did not grasp. (TLSB)

teacher – Same word used for teacher in verse 2. – Jesus was increasingly emphatic as He responded to Nicodemus' bewilderment and skepticism. In effect, Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you ought to be able to grasp this. A lot of what you have learned in Scripture points to this. I am telling it to you straight. I am not making this up. I bring it to you from heaven, from God Himself. Believe Me, this is the way it really is!" (LL)

The words imply that Nicodemus was a well known teacher. These words are not to be taken as a reproach, or as irony, but rather as an expression of sincere sadness over this sorrowful state of ignorance. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The subject of regeneration is treated so often in the Psalms and in the visions of the prophets that a teacher of the people should have been thoroughly familiar with its full import. See Psalm 51:12; Ezekiel 11:19. (Buls)

Here the dialog ends. Verses 11-21 are discourse, a monolog spoken by Jesus. (Buls)

Jesus takes Nicodemus to task for presuming to teach Israel without rightly knowing Israel's God. While not the focal point of this particular outline, pastors and teachers in Christ's Church do well to remember that our preaching and teaching begin and end in the Word of God, especially in the Gospel of his Son. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Definite article "the" suggests that Nicodemus was a recognized teacher among his contemporaries. (TLSB)

Hebrews 5:12, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"

3:11-12 Jesus then returns to the heart of his message. Evidently Nicodemus has heard the testimony and holds it intellectually while denying it spiritually. Perhaps he is like many today who treat Jesus as a great moral teacher but cannot release themselves from attempts to merit favor and earn righteousness through works. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

This is also a good time to connect the verbal Gospel with the Sacraments. Christ takes "earthly things"—water, bread, wine, and flesh and blood people—and makes them instruments and means of his grace. He blesses his Church with the "heavenly things" through the voice of Holy Absolution, the water of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:11 *we*. The plural associates others, perhaps the disciples, with Jesus. The words are true of Christians as well as of Christ. (CSB)

Again a divine asseveration as in verses 3 and 5. Nicodemus began by saying "we know." Now Jesus begins His monolog with "we know." Who are "we?" Jesus and John the Baptist? Jesus and the Holy Spirit? "We" might be a literary plural, which means Jesus is speaking only of Himself. It might be Jesus and the Father. (Buls)

In any case, they know and have seen. And so they speak and give testimony. (Buls)

"You people" is the Covenant people of God. (Buls)

Here we have an excellent example of personal evangelism. Jesus is courteous but does not soften the stark reality of Nicodemus' ignorance. (Buls)

In the pronoun "we" Jesus very likely includes the circle of his disciples (down to the present), whom he has drawn to himself and who affirm his testimony. It could also refer to the Trinity, since the Father (Jn 8:18) and the Spirit (Jn 16:5–16) also testify to Christ. "You" (plural in Greek) includes all who, having heard Christ's words, stand outside the circle of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Christ speaks for the OT prophets (He is "the Prophet"; cf. 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17) and the new Christian community, the Church. Nicodemus and the entire community he represented were blind to this testimony. (TLSB)

3:12 *I told you of earthly things* – Jesus taught Nicodemus and his peers through illustrations, parables, and signs of God's "earthly things," e.g. water, wind, natural birth. Yet even though they were "teachers of Israel," they did not believe. Would they then believe if He told them heavenly truth in heaven's own language. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Nicodemus struggled to understand the need for spiritual birth on earth. How then would he ever understand the heavenly nature and powers behind such a spiritual birth produced by the Holy Spirit? Jesus' sayings were often enigmatic to His hearers. (TLSB)

This verse is a compound-complex sentence made up of two conditional sentences, the first a fact condition and the second, in the form of the question, future more vivid. The whole verse is really a lesser to greater argument. In the first conditional sentence the protasis is a past tense and the apodosis present tense. In the second conditional sentence both verbs are future. (Buls)

What is meant by "earthly" and "heavenly" things? (Buls)

Ylvisaker: Regeneration takes place on this earth in the hearts of men, even though it is a creative act of God. With the heavenly things He alludes to the atonement, the act resolved upon in the bosom of the heavenly and eternal Love, and executed on the earth, not IN us, but FOR us who are of the earth, by the humiliated and exalted Son of Man, who is in heaven. (Buls)

Fahling: The spiritual regeneration, while a wonderful work of God, yet is an earthly things in this respect, that it takes place on earth, in the hearts of men . . . What if Christ will touch upon things wholly in the unseen? . . . He speaks of the mysteries concerning His own person and of the gracious counsel and purposes of God. (Buls)

Kretzmann: What would be the result if Christ should begin to teach of matters not open to human observation and experience, things wholly in the unseen, the essence and purposes of God? (Buls)

3:13-15 The Son of Man, the royal king who receives heaven's glory from the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13–14, is to be “exalted and lifted up” (Is 52:13–53:12), but on a cross! This event was typified by Moses' bronze serpent and its healing effects (Num 21:4–9). “Must,” as in v 7, states that this is God's Gospel way of salvation, and there is no other. Note the frequency (and importance) of the verb “believe” in the text: 3:12,15,16,18. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

3:13 *the Son of Man*. Jesus' favorite self-designation. (CSB)

Luther: “[Jesus] calls Himself the Son of Man who has His existence both on earth and in heaven [simultaneously]” (AE 22:321). (TLSB)

In the next two verses, Jesus emphasizes a vertical understanding of *anōthen* in two different contexts. He first professes that he is “from above,” since he “descended from heaven.” Yet in the divine economy of the Trinity, the Son is in constant ascension to his Father while, as the Word made flesh, his prayers continually ascend on high. This verse may then remind the Gospel's reader of Jesus' earlier words to Nathanael, “You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Since Nicodemus has already praised Jesus for the God-given signs he does (v 2), the Lord appears to be urging him to “connect the dots” and realize that as these signs have their source from above, so also the birth of which he speaks comes from above. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Jesus had the knowledge and authority to tell Nicodemus of heavenly things because He alone came from heaven. He was the Word, who was with God when the plan of salvation was determined. And He had become a perfect human being, the Son of Man, to execute the plan. (PBC)

The first example of heavenly things is found in verse 13. The second example begins in verse 14. Among human beings there is only one human who is heavenly and that is Jesus. (Buls)

"The One who is in heaven" is a variant reading, not found in all the manuscripts. Lutheran exegetes are unanimous in including the words. Lutherans say: "The amazing thing is that the incarnate Christ is in heaven also according to His human nature." The Reformed say: "His divine nature is in heaven, but only His human nature can be on earth in the state of humiliation." Lutherans insist that in the state of exaltation Jesus' human nature is everywhere. The Reformed deny this. We are dealing with a fundamental difference in theology here. Of our translations, only KJV and NKJV include these words. (Buls)

For two reasons we must include these words: (Buls)

1. A difficult reading would hardly have been added;
2. The diversity of variant readings shows an attempt to clarify these fathomless words.

While Jesus was on earth He could say: "I came from heaven and am in heaven." (Buls)

3:14-21 Jesus is sharing these words with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night, most likely for fear of being seen talking with the one he calls "Rabbi." He recognizes that Jesus is the one who has come from God because of the miraculous signs he is doing. Jesus shares with Nicodemus that he must be born again through water and the Spirit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

It is often observed that John's description of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus is a kind of theology in a circle—a coming down, followed by an upward return to the Father. Raymond Brown makes the fascinating observation that there are three statements concerning the lifting up of the Son of Man in John's Gospel and that these correspond to the three Passion predictions in the Synoptics. Further, says Brown, "being lifted up" refers to one continuous action of ascent that embraces the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension (*The Gospel According to John* [Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1966], 146). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

The text (especially v 16) is so well-known that we tend to forget the immediate context. Jesus is in dialogue with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a well-intentioned but theologically inadequate seeker for whom the love of God must have been an astonishing surprise. Max Lucado (*He Still Moves Stones* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993], 126–32) does a masterful job capturing the impact the Gospel of God's love must have made on this legalist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:14-15 Refers to the Old Testament Reading from Num 21:4–9. Throughout the Gospels, "lifted up" is used as a metaphor for crucifixion. It does not mean "lifted up in praise," as is often thought in our day. Our praise is not what draws persons to Christ. It is his perfect sacrifice for our sins. Our response is then praise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

While most translations begin a new sentence, the *kai* at the beginning certainly allows us to treat vv 13–15 as one complete thought: the Son of Man came down from heaven in order to be lifted up above the heads of sinful men and thereby to bring salvation to mankind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Again, human effort is completely discounted. The bronze serpent sat in Israel's encampment for all to see. No one cured himself of his snakebite; God effected the cure. So also, when we look upon the One who was pierced (cf. Jn 19:37), who has now ascended into heaven, we are healed of sin-sickness and eternal death. By "looking to Jesus" (Heb 12:2), we are blessed with eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

From the heavenly point of view, the deliverance from snakes in the wilderness (Num 21:4–9) was not merely for the benefit of the people at that time. As wonderful as the miracle was for the individual people who recovered from snakebites, it was also a miracle that kept the people of Israel alive. Since that was the nation from which Jesus would be born, the salvation of the world depended on Israel staying alive. In addition, it has become a lasting picture of God's deliverance for all people from *the* serpent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:14 *just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert* – Jesus draws a comparison between the lifted up bronze serpent and the lifted up Son of Man. This comparison is developed throughout the pericope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

In Num 21:4–9, the Israelites complained about their redemption from Egypt and the “miserable food” God supplied them from heaven. (Similarly, in Jn 6:25–71 many complained when the redeeming Christ said he would feed them with the real food of his body and blood, given for the life of the world.) God sent deadly serpents which bit the children of Israel, and many died (cf. 1 Cor 11:30). This was a physical manifestation of the old spiritual plague brought by Satan, “that ancient serpent” (Rev 20:2). The serpents brought death by biting their victims and injecting poison. Even so, the serpentine devil brought death to Adam and Eve, and the entire human race, by deceiving them and injecting the poison of original sin (Genesis 3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

According to God’s command and promise, however, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Note the play on the similar Hebrew words *nechash-nachushet* “snake of bronze” in Num 21: 9, leading to its name *nachushtan* “Nehushtan” in 2 Kings 18:4 (which says the serpent was preserved and revered as a “holy relic” until godly King Hezekiah ended the idolatry about 800 years later). All those who were bitten and looked up at it lived. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifted-up serpent looked like a deadly serpent, but was without poison. The lifted-up Son of Man looked like a sinner, but was only in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); he was crucified as a criminal, but was without sin (Is 53:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The bronze serpent was lifted up to make sport of the deadly serpents, as if it were a slain trophy. The Son was lifted up to make a public spectacle of the enemy, as if the defeated devil were on the cross (Col 2:15 NIV, KJV; cf. RSV footnote). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

God made the elevated bronze serpent the source of life (Num 21:8). The elevated Son of Man is God’s source of eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Whoever looked up to the bronze snake was healed. They did not need to do any good works first, only behold the “savior” God provided, and God fulfilled his objective promise. Likewise, “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” (Jn 6:40). No good works are necessary first (Epistle Lesson). God fulfills his objective promise in Christ without any merit on our part. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

All who looked to the serpent were healed. God’s promise was for the entire people. Similarly, but in a greater way, God’s salvation in Christ is for the entire world, Jew and Gentile alike. Note the emphatic *cal* “all” in Num 21:8 (NIV: “anyone”), and *pas*, “all,” in Jn 3:15, 16. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifting up of the Son refers not only to his crucifixion, but also to his resurrection and exaltation to glory in heaven. The verb *hupsoō*, “lift up,” is also in the “exalted” of Phil 2:9. Jesus speaks of the hour of his crucifixion as the hour of his glorification in John 17. cf. *anabebēken*, “gone up,” in Jn 3:13, which suggests that the lifting up of Christ on the cross is also his exaltation back to heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

To help Nicodemus link Christ with the Scripture he already knew. It also point to the fact that there is only way to be saved. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

Some versions begin a new section at this point, others that a new section begins at verse 16. In either case they attribute these words (from here to verse 21) to the Evangelist John. But we note that Jesus is still speaking in verses 16 and 17. (Buls)

Jesus is explaining. Verse 12 denotes what is observable: the results of regeneration. Verse 13 denotes what is not observable: the eternal counsel of God for man and the marvel of the person of the incarnate Christ. Verse 14 introduces the second unobservable truth: The salvation of mankind. Verses 15 to 21 are like the opening of the flower with beautiful petals. Jesus moves from the unobservable to the observable in verse 21, the good works of a Christian. In other words, Jesus is the speaker to the end of verse 21. (Buls)

Back to verse 14. (Buls)

Kretzmann: There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptile after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal. Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross. And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Buls)

"Must be" is impersonal and does not denote compulsion or fate. The necessity is caused by the will of God and the dire and awful condition of mankind. (Buls)

"Lifted up" are correlative adverbs of manner, indicating a precise comparison. What they have in common is the verb "lift." The Old Testament account is found at Numbers 21:8ff. This verse reminds us immediately of John 12:32-34 where the same verb is found. (Buls)

Bengel: Where there was no other remedy. (Buls)

True. What he is implying is that there is no remedy except in the uplifted Son of man. The impersonal verb does not denote compulsion or fate but the necessary willing obedience of the Son of man. For it was for this purpose that He became incarnate. Lenski insists that the point of comparison should not be pressed beyond the idea of "being lifted up." After due consideration we prefer the interpretation of Kretzmann: (Buls)

The act of Moses in the wilderness, in erecting the brazen serpent before the eyes of the stricken people, was typical, symbolical, Numbers 21: 1-9. . . Jesus is the antitype of the brazen serpent. . . There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. 1) The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptiles after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal; 2) Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross; 3)

And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, shall not be punished with everlasting destruction, but have eternal life. (Buls)

Hendriksen has a good exposition of type and anti type at this point, but ruins it completely when he adds:

Though Christ is lifted up in the sight of all, he does not save all. (Buls)

He believes in a limited atonement and his interpretations are very often synergistic. More on this later. (Buls)

Lenski: The Book of Wisdom 16:6 calls this serpent the symbol of salvation, and in church decorations it is constantly used to picture Jesus. (Buls)

so must the Son of Man must be lifted up – “Lifted up” (*hupsōsen*) is an obvious reference to the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21. It may also suggest the glorification of the Suffering Servant in Is 52:13: “He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” Later in John’s Gospel (12:32–33), Jesus uses this word to signal the kind of death he was to die. And the same word is used again in Acts 2:33 and 5:31 as a reference to the ascension of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:15-16 Jesus makes clear that salvation is a gift, for the Son of God is himself a gift that God gave. No restrictions are placed upon the recipients, for “whoever believes” lives. The Son of God come down at Christmas finally fulfilled his mission on Good Friday. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Luther here emphasizes the personal union in Christ. He notes that while earlier Jesus spoke of the Son of Man, he now shows that “God’s Son and Mary’s Son is only one Person. He appropriates both natures for the work of salvation and redemption from eternal death” (LW 22:351). It is not a mere man who saves us, nor is it God exercising his unbridled power. Instead, the God-man Jesus Christ conquers through surrender and saves his people from sin, death, and devil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:15 *whoever* – All the “that” clauses in this section (15,16,17,20,21) denote purpose. In this instance the word “that” hangs on “eternal life.” By the way, the passive infinitive denotes what was done to Jesus, what He suffered on the cross. There is no such thing as faith in Christ unless it be in the crucified Christ. Compare Galatians 2:20. The Son of God loved me by giving Himself in my stead. That is the only way in which the love of God is revealed to us. (Buls)

That word “everyone” does not denote limitation but open invitation. Just as the serpent was lifted up for all on the occasion, so Jesus was lifted up for all. Furthermore, “who believes” does not mean that man must do something first to make the atonement an actuality but rather that God Himself causes the hearers to believe in what has already been done for all. (Buls)

believes. That is the whole point of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in verses 1-10. Faith in Christ is always the God-given *modus* of salvation, not the man-generated *causa* of salvation. (Buls)

Note that both participle and verb, are in the present tense. Being in possession of life eternal is a present reality for the believer. For him there is no such thing as judgment. (Buls)

The promise belongs to everyone who believes. It is universal. No one who believes is excluded. At the same time the promise belongs to each one who believes. It is personal. God knows our names, and each of us has eternal life. (PBC)

eternal life. An infinitely high quality of life in living fellowship with God—both now and forever. (CSB)

Bengel: The cross is the ladder to heaven. Eternal death, because of the poison of sin. Eternal life, by regeneration and faith. This mention of eternal life is made at the earliest opportunity in each instance in the discourses of the Savior, and occurs in this passage first (in the Gospel of John). (Buls)

Note that Bengel considered the words "should not perish" textual. They are found in the Koine text and therefore in KJV and NKJV. This difference should not be passed over lightly. By the way, the term "everlasting life" occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John and six times in 1 John. (Buls)

The dying Israelites who looked at the bronze serpent lived. Now everyone who looks in faith at the Son of Man will live forever. The typology and the textual variants support taking the words "in him" with "believes," not "have," though both make sense. Echēi, "have," is present subjunctive, indicating that the believer has eternal life both now, in the midst of deadly snakes, and forever in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

"so that" (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this "lifting up" of the Son of Man is that every believer may not "perish" (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have "life eternal." In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins "believing" with "life." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:1–15 Nicodemus, though "the teacher of Israel," shows that he cannot comprehend the Spirit's miraculous work of new birth through Baptism. Human reason, darkened by sin, cannot accept that God can grant spiritual rebirth through ordinary water used with His Word. But such a great promise has come from none other than the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross for our salvation! • O Holy Spirit, I praise You that You have given me new birth to a living hope through Christ's resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

For God So Loved the World

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

3:16-17 V 16 is referred to by many Christians as the Gospel in a nutshell. Since Baptism is a Means of Grace that conveys the gifts of the Gospel, and since the water of Baptism is sometimes administered by way of a scallop shell, Baptism might be referred to as the Gospel in a scallop shell. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:16 *God so loved the world.* The great truth that motivated God's plan of salvation (cf. 1Jn 4:9–10). (CSB)

Very likely the best known verse in the Bible. Verses 16-18 explain verses 14-15.(Buls)

"World" is the Greek word "kosmos." It must denote all human beings. Not just people who have been chosen, or "elected" to believe. (Buls)

"So that" denotes actual result. (Buls)

"One and only" is translated in KJV, NASB, AAT and NKJV as "only-begotten." Others translate it "only" in the sense of unique. The Nicene Creed and our Lutheran fathers understood this word in the sense of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. (Buls)

The verse clearly shows that Jesus is God's gift to all human beings of all time. (Buls)

The love referred to is the aorist of agape; the "one and only" notes a uniqueness, only one of its kind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Greek agapao, used repeatedly in John; God's sacrificial and faithful love for the entire world alienated from God, that is, all humankind. (TLSB)

God values, cherishes, and esteems mankind on the basis of God's own being; from eternity he is love (1 In 4:8). He loved the whole world, all people (vv 17–18 preclude a limited love or atonement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible. In verse 14 "so" meant "thus" in the sense of "in the same way." But here in verse 16 it means "to such an extent." "For" is an explanatory particle, used here to elucidate verses 14-15 further. This example is the clearest in the New Testament as to what God's love means. It does not say that God "liked" the world. He did not. But He loved the whole world in all its misery and sin, loved it to redeem it. (Buls)

"The world" must mean the entire world of people. The Reformed limit it to the elect from every nation. Compare Lenski and Hendriksen on this point. Parallel passages here are John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:12-21. More could be mentioned but these are sufficient. (Buls)

Again and again the Scriptures stress the fact that IN CHRIST, in His suffering, death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, redemption, justification, eternal salvation FOR ALL MEN is an accomplished fact. Because of their twin false teaching of a limited atonement and synergism, the Reformed (and those like them) teach that forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, justification are merely potential, merely making it possible for all to be saved. Read Article IV of the *Apology* and Article II of the *Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration)* where again and again reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, redemption are used synonymously and interchangeably as accomplished facts for all men, posited in the means of grace for all. (Buls)

Even some Lutherans claim that although John 3:16 is universal, 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 4:25 are merely potential. That won't do. To deny the universality of the justification of all men, in Christ, at Romans 4:25 or the universality of reconciliation of all men, in Christ, at 2 Corinthians 5:19, means to deny the universal atonement *per se*. (Buls)

Back to verse 16: "so that" with the indicative, to denote actual result, is found only here and at Galatians 2:13. (It can be used with the infinitive to denote actual result). Note that "so much-so that" are correlative. The first "His" is relational denoting the divinity of Jesus. "One and only" makes that even clearer. KJV, NKJV, NASB, and AAT (2nd ed.) translate "only-begotten" denoting the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. All other translations have "only" which is surely wrong. (Buls)

By the way, some commentators feel that verses 14-21 are the words of the Evangelist not those of Jesus, for only in this passage Jesus calls Himself by this term. But if Jesus gave the word John at 1:18, why couldn't He use it of Himself? It is powerful in the mouth of Jesus. He knew that He proceeded from all eternity from the Father and yet He was willing to become man to die for us. (Buls)

world. All people on earth—or perhaps all creation. (CSB)

kosmos – This refers to everything in the world but in this case especially that portion of the population that is hostile to the God. This word is used 75 times in John.

that he gave. God gives, gives, gives. That's the story of the Gospel. "That" introduces another purpose clause, repeating and amplifying the one in verse 15. There it was stressed from the point of view of the Father sending and giving His eternal Son. "Whoever believes," not restrictive but invitational, for all. "Not perish," death and destruction, for the believer, are gone, abolished. For him death is not dying but the beginning of eternal life. "But" following a negative is very strong: "quite to the contrary." We know nothing quite so antithetical as eternal death and eternal life. (Buls)

God not only sent His Son, but also offered Him to the world. He became our atoning sacrifice. (TLSB)

This verse brings together several of John's most important and frequent theological words: *theos*, "God," *huios*, "Son," *monogenēs*, "only-begotten," *agapaō*, "love" (about 40 occurrences, including the noun *agapē*), *kosmos*, "world" (75), *pisteuō*, "believe" (90), and *zōē* "life" (35, of which 17 are with *aiōnios*, "eternal"). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

The conjunction *hōste* (NIV: "that") followed by the indicative emphasizes that the result actually happened (M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, pp. 121–22, para. 350). The Father actually gave up his Son to death, only to receive him back in glory, fulfilling the typology of Abraham, a human father who also did not spare his only son and received him back alive (Gen 22:16; cf. Rom 8:32). The adjective *monogenēs* may mean "one and only, unique," or "only-begotten" (see *Holy Bible: New Testament—New Evangelical Translation*, 2d ed. [Cleveland, NET Publishing, 1992] appendix 2. c. 6., pp. 542–44). The *hina* clause indicates purpose: God sacrificed his Son in order to save. This reasserts the bronze serpent typology of vv 14–15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

God’s love brought results. He offered the ultimate sacrifice for the world He loved. (PBC)

his only Son. See 1:14, 18; cf. Ge 22:2, 16; Ro 8:32. Although believers are also called “sons of God” (2Co 6:18; Rev 21:7), Jesus is uniquely God’s Son. (CSB)

monogene - Sole or only born. – auios A child or son. In this case the son was not adopted like we are.

Believes – pisteuo - To have faith in God. Found 90 times in John.

“Whoever believes in (the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith,) may have eternal life (John 3:15) Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit” (FC SD VII 70-71). Luther: “Look at the words, I beseech you, to determine how and of whom He is speaking... No one is here excluded. God’s Son was given for all. All should believe, and all who do believe should not perish, etc. Take hold of your own nose, I beseech you, to determine whether you are not a human being (that is, part of the world) and like any other man, (you) belong to the number of those comprised in the word “all” (WLS 1859). (TLSB)

not perish – apollumi To be destroyed, in this case eternally. To die. (CSB)

Eternal separation from God. Cf. Is. 66:24; Mk. 9:48. “Out of His immense goodness and mercy, God provides for the public preaching of His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan for our redemption, that of the holy, only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

eternal – Adjectives like perpetual, for ever, everlasting are used to describe eternal.

Life – Life like a lifetime.

3:17-18 Jesus was sent to earth as an authoritative representative of the Father. A contrast should be noted between the judging/condemning and the saving act of his mission of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

3:17 *did not send* - “so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

As noted above, verses 14-17 tell us what Christ accomplished for us. This verse is the last in this section. "For" is explanatory, emphatically elucidating verse 16. It tells us why God DID NOT

and why He DID send His Son. Mankind has a bad conscience because of sinfulness and sin. According to his flesh he is always listening to Satan who pictures God as enemy, not as friend. Even Christians, insofar as they still have a flesh, all too often think of God as enemy and judge rather than as Savior and Friend in Christ. (Buls)

Jesus says: "God did NOT send His Son into the world in order to judge (condemn) the world, but, quite to the contrary, in order through Him (Christ) the world be saved." Compare John 12:47 and then His words to His enemies at 5:34. (Buls)

send son – apostello The one who was set apart and sent specifically for this cause.

judge – krino Someone who makes a decision and judges right from wrong. The trial in our case left to defend ourselves would result in being condemned, punished and sentenced to eternal damnation.

The Church of Rome, because of its works righteousness, was constantly presenting God as Judge. Over and over Luther said that the Gospel presents God as Savior, not as Judge. Compare Galatians 4:4,5 and Galatians 3:13,14. The "so that" clauses in Galatians 4:5 and 3:14 (two sets of them) respectively denote what we call objective and subjective justification. In Christ, the blessing of Abraham (justification) became effective for all nations. Christ redeemed all the condemned, all human beings. And in Galatians 4:5 we are told that Christ came to redeem the condemned, all human beings. The Gospel portrays Christ as Savior, not as Judge. (Buls)

We know that Christ will return in judgment, but at this time, Jesus doesn't mention God's alien work of condemning and crushing through the Law. Instead, he focuses completely on the unmerited favor God shows the world. While not explicit in this verse, *anōthen* remains implicit, for God sent Jesus from above into his creation, "in order that the world might be saved through him." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

save – The following adjectives say it well: Deliver, protect, heal, preserve or make whole.

"Sent with a commission." Note that "all people -- the world" is used thrice in this verse: to denote Christ's incarnation, becoming a man, for all; again, for all people; and again, all people. Christ came to condemn no one, not even Judas. That should never be forgotten. Mix no Law into the Gospel. (Buls)

The two *hina* clauses show purpose from two different perspectives. In the first, the active voice asserts that God's purpose was not to condemn. In the second, John goes against the natural flow of language and switches to the passive *sōthēi*, "be saved," to emphasize the Son as the agent who does not carry out his saving work independently of the Father, but humbly serves the Father's purpose. The NIV obliterates the difference between the two *hina* clauses; the KJV, NKJV, RSV and NET have it right. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Another explanation. The obvious reason for which this verse is added is that people (even Christians) think of God merely as a judge. This verse has two more purpose clauses. The first tells us why God did NOT send His Son, and the second tells us why He DID send Him. Christians need to listen to this verse. Christians, too, often slip into the false idea that Jesus is merely a Judge. (Buls)

Note that "world" occurs three times in this verse. The first instance, in a prepositional phrase, denotes the incarnation. The second and third instances denote all mankind. (Buls)

By the way, if "kosmos" (according to the Reformed theology) in verse 16 means only the elect, the conclusion of verse 17 is difficult to understand. "Kosmos" simply must mean "all people." (Buls)

Note: Pentecost I is the same day as Trinity Sunday. John 3:1-17 clearly speaks of the Trinity. The Triune God is the saving God. One cannot be saved without faith in the Trinity. It is suggested that on this day the Athanasian Creed be used rather than the Apostles' or Nicene Creed because the Athanasian Creed is so very clear on the doctrine of the Trinity. Many sects deny the Trinity. They are not Christian. Therefore, we must stress the Trinity in our teaching and preaching. (Buls)

3:18 *believes* – For the first clause read Romans 8:1; John 3:36a; 5:24; Mark 16:16a. The believer is judged neither now nor on Judgment Day. He will hear only: "Come, ye blessed of My Father." Well, then, why are the majority lost? Jesus answers that with "but, however." (Buls)

condemned – Luther: "All men are already condemned and imprisoned to be damned eternally, but the Son of God was given to us to redeem us from that judgment" (AE 22:380). (TLSB)

Kretzmann: The unbeliever refuses to believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And therefore this unbelief condemns him. . . Unbelief is thus the sin of sins, for it rejects the salvation which has been gained and is offered for all sins. . . Their sin is no longer the result of ignorance, but of deliberate choice and preference. (Buls)

Now read John 12:47,48. Jesus does not judge the rejecter. His Word of Law, which warns against rejection of the Gospel, will judge that man. Note the tense of the dejection verbs. The first denotes that judgment sets in at the time of refusal to believe. The second makes that refusal plain. Judgment begins with and is caused by man's refusal in the face of clear knowledge. The text is making plain that the unbeliever rejects God's plain revelation. "In the name of God's one and only Son," is adjectival, the specific revelation about Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. The judgment on the last day will be only the public announcement of what was already true in this life and finalized at the time of death. (Buls)

already – The final judgment has moved into the present with the coming of His kingdom (cf. Mt. 3:10). (TLSB)

does not believe.† John is not speaking of momentary beliefs and doubts but of continuing, settled faith. (CSB)

Like a bitten Israelite, the sinner still carries the devil's poison of original sin, but through believing in the Son he will live (*sola fide*). Whoever does not look to the Son stands condemned. The poison of sin will kill him because he has rejected the only (-begotten) Cure, and there is no other. His "name" is synonymous with his person, words, and work. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Everything hangs on faith! In fact, judgment can be said to have taken place "already" (*ēdē*), based on the faith or lack of it in the hearers. *mē pepisteuken* in the perfect tense indicates a

continuance in unbelief, rather than an initial recoil from the message. Compare this whole section (3:15–19) with 12:46–48 for some striking similarities. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:19-20 Imagery of light and darkness (cf. Jn 1:4–9) is now added to the motif of life and death (bronze serpent). *Prassō*, “does,” implies habit. Those who continue to practice worthless deeds hate the Son. They will do anything to stay out of the light because of what it does (cf. Job 24:13–17). *Elengchō* can mean “bring to light, expose,” “convict,” “reprove, correct,” or “punish” (BAGD p. 249); all are true. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Jesus gives a definition of what he means regarding judgment. The inner motive for choosing the darkness is because humankind is wicked and in need of saving. “Evil” is also translated “worthless.”

For those used to thinking of the end-times judgment, these verses add a dimension about “the judgment” (*hē krisis* with the article). Jesus’ words replicate the dualistic vocabulary of ch 1 (“light” and “darkness”). The life of the disciple in response to God’s gift is described simply: he “does what is true” (literally, *poiōn tēn alētheian*). The light comes and reveals us for who we really are. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:19 *the judgment* – Greek “krisis, brings to mind the judicial process, including the adverse verdict brought on by rejecting the Son of God. (TLSB)

light – “This is” is like the English “now.” The English colon is inferred. Look at John 1:1-5. Jesus is the only source of true spiritual light. Compare John 8:12 and 1 John 2:18. This Light shines in all the Messianic promises beginning with Genesis 3:15. He is the comforting Light of forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, redemption. “Has come,” has come with permanent results (perfect tense). This refers to His incarnation. The implication is that this Light shines on all men. John 1:9. (Buls)

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3:20 *does evil* – Greek “phaulos” means base. (TLSB)

On verses 20 and 21 Stoeckhardt says:

Jesus here sheds light on the contrast between faith and unbelief, which also becomes evident in the works and conduct of man, because he who does not believe shies away from the light, hiding from others his evil works, of which he must be ashamed. However, he who believes in Christ, doing what is right before God, confidently stepping before God and man, with his good works, which are done in God. (Buls)

Man can judge another man only by his works. Verse 20 elucidates and explains what was said in verses 18 and 19 chiastically. Verse 18 speaks of the believer, verse 19 of the unbeliever. But in verses 20 and 21 this is reversed. Note the contrasting words in verses 20 and 21. Look at John

5:29 where the same distinction of verbs is made: "worthless -- genuine;" "hatred opposed to attraction;" "exposed as opposed to made plain." Note what the two verses have in common. In the former, shame is involved whereas in the latter, forthright openness is stressed. We translate the two verses literally to bring out the utter contrast and the meaning of crucial words: "You see, everyone who constantly practices worthless deeds hates the Light, and therefore does not approach the Light, lest his deeds be exposed. But the one who is constantly producing the true and genuine works approaches the Light in order that his works may be made plain as to the fact that they have been worked by God Himself." (Buls)

hates the light ...exposed – Those with low moral standards hate disclosure of their foul deed, just as marauders of the night flee from the light of day. (TLSB)

The unbeliever loves the works of darkness but is ashamed of them. That is proved by the fact that he refuses to approach Christ, for if he did, his works would be exposed for what they are, worthless and actively evil. However, the believer, who by faith in Jesus does the will of God (third use of the Law), gladly approaches Christ so that everyone can see that God and God alone "works in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Compare 1 John 1:5-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 1:13. (Buls)

3:21 *whoever...does what is true* – Augustine: "He that does truth accuses his evil works in himself, spares not himself, forgives not himself, that God may forgive him: for that which he desire God to forgive, he himself acknowledges, and he come to the light; to which he is thankful for showing him what he should hate in himself. (NPNF1 &:86). (TLSB)

The unbeliever, dead in his trespasses and sins, is a man of dead and worthless works and is actually ashamed of these works, though he glories in them. The believer, alive unto God by faith in Christ, forgiven and reconciled, is a man of living and genuine works of which he is not ashamed. He gladly acknowledges that God is the author not only of his salvation but also of his new life in Christ. Read Matthew 5:16. The Christian wants people to see his works, not himself. His works glorify the heavenly Father. (Buls)

"[He who] does the works that flow from a regenerated heart, such a one comes to the light. He is glad to have his works revealed in order that they may speak for him. For they are in reality not his own . . . they are done and performed in God, who giveth both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Those are truly good works that are done in communion with God" (Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary*, NT [St. Louis: Concordia, 1921] 1:424). V 10 of the Epistle says much the same thing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

has been done through God – God is at work in those who have responded to the Gospel (cf. Php. 2:13; 1 Th. 2:13). (TLSB)

3:16–21 God gives His only Son as a sacrificial gift to deliver the world from condemnation and to give eternal life to those who believe in Him. When we continue in an immoral lifestyle, we naturally resist divine disclosure of our sin and thus our need for a Savior. Do not flee the light, but repent. God has revealed His strong love in His Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive your sins and give you life. • O heavenly Father, grant that my life may be a vivid testimony to Your sacrificial and faithful love in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

John the Baptist's Exalts Christ

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison). 25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease." 31 He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. 33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. 34 For he whom God has sent utters 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 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

3:22 *Judean countryside* – Jesus left Jerusalem and headed north. (TLSB)

baptized. According to 4:2 only the disciples actually baptized. (CSB)

Jesus' disciples performed Baptisms and thus were instruments through whom He made disciples. (TLSB)

3:23 *Aenon.* Possibly about eight miles south of Scythopolis (Beth Shan), west of the Jordan. (CSB)

water was plentiful – "Aenon" probably derives from Hebrew 'ayin, "a spring." This suggests Aenon had the water necessary for John the Baptist's ministry. (TLSB)

3:24 Shows that, for a while, John's ministry and Jesus' ministry occurred at the same time. (TLSB)

3:25 *discussion arose...between...purification.* The Dead Sea (Qumran) Scrolls show that some Jews were deeply interested in the right way to achieve ceremonial purification. (CSB)

The precise point of this dispute is not mentioned, but perhaps it centered on where true cleansing from sin was to be found among the various baptisms. (TLSB)

3:26 *they.* John's disciples (v 25). (TLSB)

Rabbi ... all are going to Him. Their comment was prompted by envy because of Jesus' growing influence. (TLSB)

bore witness. John's disciples knew that he had testified about Jesus, but they loved their master and were envious of Jesus' success. (CSB)

3:27 The words are true of both Jesus and John (and of everyone). Both had what God had given them, so there was no place for envy. (CSB)

John's ministry as the Messiah's forerunner depended completely on God's grace, ruling out all boasting and judgments of comparative worth. (TLSB)

given. The verb "to give" is used frequently in this Gospel (76 times), especially of the things the Father gives the Son. (CSB)

3:29 *the bridegroom.* The most important man at a wedding, referring here to Jesus. The friend (best man) is there only to help the bridegroom, which describes the role of John the Baptist. (CSB)

A wedding metaphor emphasizes the difference between the Bridegroom and His attendant friend ("best man"). The Bride, the Church, belongs to Jesus, not John (cf 2Co 11:2; Eph 5:25–33). (TLSB)

rejoices greatly. Not because he was on center stage, but because the bridegroom was there. John's joy was to hear of Jesus' success. (CSB)

3:30 John the Baptist had been sent to prepare the way for the Messiah and here reaffirms his subordinate position. (CSB)

John's preparatory ministry, of divine necessity, had to decrease once Christ appeared. How great was John's humility! (TLSB)

3:31-36 This is likely commentary from the evangelist rather than reflection from John the Baptist. (TLSB)

3:31 *The one who comes from above.* Jesus, whose heavenly origin (cf. 1Co 15:47) meant much to John. (CSB)

the one who is from the earth. A general expression that could apply to anyone, but here it particularly refers to John the Baptist. (CSB)

John the Baptist was of human origin, like the rest of humankind. (TLSB)

3:32 *bears witness...seen and heard.* Jesus taught from divine experience. (CSB)

Builds on v 31. As true God, Jesus alone bore witness to knowledge from heaven. (TLSB)

no one. Does not mean that no person accepted what he said (see v. 33) but that people in general refused his teaching. (CSB)

3:33 *set his seal.* † When anyone believes Christ's testimony, he accepts the truth that Jesus came from heaven and that God was acting in him for the world's salvation. He thereby certifies that God is truthful. (CSB)

Whoever has faith in Christ "seals," or certifies, that God is truthful. (TLSB)

3:34 *whom God has sent.* Jesus. (CSB)

without measure. Some hold that it is only to Jesus that the Spirit is given without limit. Others take the “he” as a reference to Christ’s giving the Spirit without limit to believers. (CSB)

The Father gave the Holy Spirit to the Son without measure. This distinguished Jesus from all other recipients of the Spirit, including Israel’s judges, kings, and prophets (cf Jgs 6:34; 1Sm 16:13; Mi 3:8). (TLSB)

3:35 *given all things into his hand* – “To make alive, to have all judgment and all power in heaven and on earth, to have all things in His hands, to have all things subject beneath His feet, to cleanse from sin, and so on, are not created gifts. These are divine, infinite properties. Yet, according to the declaration of Scripture, these have been given and communicated to the man Christ” (FC SD VIII 55). (TLSB)

3:36 *believes.* Eternal life is a present possession, not something the believer will only obtain later. (CSB)

obey the Son. Cf v 18. To believe in the Son (cf Rm 1:5). (TLSB)

wrath of God. A strong expression, meaning that God is actively opposed to everything evil. The word “wrath” occurs only here in John’s Gospel. (CSB)

God will judge and condemn those who refuse to believe in Christ (Rm 1:18; 2:5; Mt 3:7). (TLSB)

remains. A sinner cannot expect God’s wrath eventually to fade away. God’s opposition to evil is both total and permanent. (CSB)

3:22–36 John the Baptist steps aside when Christ comes because Jesus is the Son of God from heaven and possesses the Holy Spirit without measure. God reveals His wrath against those who do not believe in His Son and deprives them of everlasting life. But He gives everlasting life to all who trust in Jesus. • Lord Jesus, give to me a full measure of Your Spirit, that I may always remain faithful to You and bear witness to You. Amen. (TLSB)