

John 3:31-36

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John the Baptist tells his disciples that Jesus has come from Heaven and will teach of the things of Heaven, because He has firsthand knowledge of Heaven and of God. He speaks the words of God Himself. Indeed, Jesus is God the Son, son of God the Father. Whoever lives a life of faith in the Son will experience the fullness of life, but whoever disobeys the Son will experience punishment from God.

Then, further speaking of Jesus, who was to increase, John makes a statement that sounds very much like what Jesus told Nicodemus. John says:

He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth.

This sounds a lot like verse 13, which says “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.” John is clearly saying that Jesus came *from above*. To emphasize the point, John repeats that *He who comes from heaven is above all*. Jesus came *from above*, He came down *from heaven* to earth. That indicates that He is God. Because He is God, Jesus is *above all*. John made this point twice that Jesus is *above all*. His disciples were concerned that Jesus’ ministry was beginning to overtake John’s in popularity. John now makes clear that Jesus is not only above John, He is *above all*, which includes everything.

In speaking of *he who is of the earth*, John first says that he is *from the earth*. This contrasts to being *from above*, or *from heaven*. The one who is *from the earth* quite naturally *speaks of things that are of the earth*. Without instruction, someone that is *from the earth* can’t actually speak of things from *heaven*, not having been there. Perhaps John has the Jewish leader in mind who stirred up his disciples. The idea might be “Who do you want to listen to?” We can know the things of heaven by listening to One who is from there. Jesus *comes from above*, He *comes from heaven*. And He is the ultimate authority, as He is *above all*.

John seems to be setting up his disciple to understand that he ought to listen to and follow Jesus Himself. Further, he might have been instructing his disciple not to listen to the Jewish rulers. The Jew, to whom his disciples spoke, and who appears to have incensed them, is *of the earth*. He does not know the things of heaven, unless he listens to One who is from heaven. However, when John says *no one receives His testimony*, his emphasis is likely on the rulers, who represent the nation, who are not receiving the *testimony* of Jesus.

Jesus, being *from above*, which is to say *from heaven*, *has seen and heard* the things of heaven. It is of those things *from above*, *from heaven* of which *He testifies*. This would include Jesus’ testimony to Nicodemus of how to be born again, by simply having enough faith to look upon Jesus on the cross, hoping to be delivered from the poison of sin (John 3:14-15). The root word translated *testifies* is “martyreo,” the Greek word from which we get “martyr.” It means “to bear true witness.” Jesus bears a true witness of the things of *heaven* because He descended from

heaven. He is speaking of things He *has seen and heard*. He is an eye witness. He knows these things firsthand, so He is the best witness possible, and ought to be listened to.

However, in spite of being the only firsthand witness available, *no one receives His testimony*. The root of the word translated *testimony* is “martyria,” which means “to bear true witness.” Jesus bears true witness of the true things of heaven. He is “above all.” He knows of what He speaks. But *no one receives His testimony*. In saying *no one*, John is likely focusing on the Jewish rulers, who represent the nation. If the rulers reject Jesus, the nation will be deemed to have rejected Him, even if some believe. This is of course exactly what transpired.

John clarifies that individuals can receive His *testimony* by adding, *He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true*. Even though the nation, through the rulers, is rejecting the *testimony* of Jesus, the One from heaven, any individual can believe in Jesus’ witness. If anyone *has received His testimony* through believing in His words, then that person has *set his seal* of a key thing: *that God is true*. A personalized *seal* was a unique imprint made on a blot of wax. It was like a signature. It was a testimony of agreement. Anyone who *has received Jesus’ testimony*, by believing His words, has created his own witness, a witness of agreement with Jesus’ testimony. And agreeing with Jesus’ testimony is also agreeing *that God is true*.

This is a pretty clear string of logic that points to a major theme of the Gospel of John, that Jesus is not only sent from God, but is God. He came “from above,” “from heaven.” He speaks of things He saw in heaven. And if you agree with His testimony of what He says (that He comes from heaven) then you agree that *God is true*. That means that Jesus is God. This fulfills one of John’s purposes for writing his gospel, so that people will believe that Jesus is the “Son of God.”

John the Baptist continues speaking to his disciples, who expressed discontent that their ministry was falling behind Jesus’s ministry. John says *For He whom God has sent (Jesus) speaks the words of God*. That is why any individual who *has received His testimony* bears witness to agreeing *that God is true*. If we agree with the messenger of God, we agree with the truth of God. In doing so, we testify that *God is true*.

John then adds *for He gives the Spirit without measure*. This phrase *He gives the Spirit without measure* is linked to the prior phrase *He whom God has sent speaks the words of God* by the word *for*. We can take from this that the *Spirit* of God is poured out upon humanity through the *words of God*. The term *without measure* means “without limit.” The Bible has a theme that the *words of God*, or “word of God” are the source and supply of all we desire most. They are the path to the greatest treasures of life, and the greatest fulfillment of life. A partial listing reinforces this point:

- “He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.” (Deuteronomy 8:3)
 - Jesus quoted this verse when resisting the temptation of Satan (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4).

- “Why do you spend money for what is not bread,

And your wages for what does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,

And delight yourself in abundance” (Isaiah 55:2).

- “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;” (Psalm 19:7).
- “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:19-20).
 - This verse is connected with a prior verse where God encourages those in the church of Laodicea to buy all the gold they wanted, and become truly rich. The way to do this is to hear God’s voice, and receive His instruction. To fellowship with Him, as with someone with whom you would dine.

John indicates that when we receive *the words of God*, we also gain the *Spirit of God*. And there is no limit to how much this can be done. It comes *without measure*. There is no “while supplies last” or “will be given to the first thousand who arrive.” We can receive all we are willing to receive.

John now makes even clearer that God is three persons, and Jesus is one of those persons—meaning that He is the Son of God. John testifies to his disciples that *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand*. John had already said that Jesus was “from above” and “above all things.” Now John adds that Jesus is *the Son*.

Further, *the Father loves the Son*. If we connect this with the passage on Nicodemus, we can gather that *the Father loves the Son*, and the Father also loves the world, so He sent His Son to redeem the world (John 3:16). *The Father loves the Son*, and the Son obeyed the Father in taking on human flesh, and dying for our sins on a cross, being “lifted up” as the bronze serpent was lifted up. Because of this obedience, *the Father has given all things into His hand*.

We know from passages such as Philippians 2:5-11 that Jesus was lifted up, and granted authority to rule over all things because He learned obedience as a human, even to death on a cross. Here John speaks of this event in past tense, due to the certainty that it will be fulfilled. This is a common prophetic device.

John the Baptist finishes his discourse to his disciples, who were likely stirred up by a Jewish ruler to express dismay to their master that Jesus’s ministry was surpassing theirs in popularity. John tells his disciples *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 is speaking this to his own disciples, and appears to summarize to his followers how they ought to think about life moving forward.

First, John makes an unconditional statement, that anyone *who believes in the Son has eternal life*. This connects directly with the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. All that it takes to be born again is to have enough faith to look at Jesus lifted up on the cross, hoping to be delivered from the poisonous venom of sin, and the death of separation from God that it causes. Then, just like the Israelites in the wilderness who looked at the bronze snake that was lifted up on a pole, they will be delivered, and be born again. They will have *eternal life*, which is a life given of the Spirit.

This is not conditioned upon any further obedience. The children of Israel in the wilderness had no further test required. Their lives were saved from the venomous vipers solely through faith, solely through looking at the bronze serpent. However, although that generation of Israelites were given life, they did not possess their inheritance. They still had to follow in obedience and enter the Promised Land in order to possess the inheritance they had been granted. Through their disobedience, they lost their opportunity to possess that which God had granted them, to enter and possess the land.

The phrase *eternal life* is a translation of the Greek words “aionios zoe.” The Greek word “aionios” means “to the age.” The context determines what age, and whether the beginning or end of the age is being spoken of. The Greek word “zoe” refers to the quality, or fulfillment of life, rather than the mere presence. It refers to the spiritual man.

To the unconditional assertion that whoever believes has eternal life, John adds a provision that is fully conditional: *he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*. Those Israelites who looked upon the serpent were saved from death without further condition, even as anyone who has enough faith to look upon Jesus is saved from the death of being separated from God without further condition. Those who are born again are received into God’s family for all eternity. There is nothing that can separate any child of God from His love (Romans 8:38-39). And God is the unconditional inheritance of every child of God, regardless of their deeds (Romans 8:17a).

However, being a child of God comes with great responsibility. A royal responsibility. Each child of God has a stewardship, and an assigned ministry to serve as Jesus served. To follow His witness, and follow in His example. Each has the opportunity to adopt the same mindset that Jesus chose, and humble themselves as John the Baptist humbled himself, serving the mission to serve Jesus Christ. The promised reward for this obedience is to share the reward that the Father gave to His Son.

The one who believes, having had enough faith to look, is given new birth, and has eternal life (“aionios zoe”) but *he who does not obey the Son will not see life* (“zoe”). The one who believes, and is gifted new birth, but does not walk in obedience, will not experience a fulfilled life (“zoe”). Just like Israel in the wilderness, they will have the gift, but not possess its benefits, because of disobedience. To be born again is as simple as looking and hoping. But to actually experience the immense benefits of that new birth requires that we *obey the Son*. The path to *see life* (“zoe”), to experience a life of abundance is through obedience. When we walk in obedience, amazing rewards are promised. John does not note these here, but they are worth noting, from

other passages, particularly since the alternative for disobedience is that *the wrath of God abides on him*.

- Revelation sets forth that those who have a faithful witness, not fearing death, rejection or loss, are “overcomers” and overcome as Jesus overcame. They will share the reign of Jesus. Jesus states:
 - “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).
- Philippians sets forth that those who adopt the same mindset as Jesus adopted will be exalted as Jesus was exalted by His Father (Philippians 2:5-11). The Apostle Paul adopted this mindset, and concluded that “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21).
- Paul sets forth in his letters to the Corinthians that the main thing we should live for is to receive positive rewards at the Judgement of Christ, for having walked in service to Him, to please Him:
 - “Now if any man builds (with their deeds) on the foundation (Jesus) with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day (of judgement) will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).
 - “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- The book of Hebrews makes clear that everything will be judged, and all things secret in this life will be brought to light in the judgement. It further admonishes us to gather, and remind one another of these things, all the more as the Judgement Day approaches:
 - “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12-13).
 - “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (to reward His people); and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day (of judgement) drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25).
- Both Peter and James note that God will exalt those who humble themselves by following in His ways, rather than their own way:
 - “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you” (James 4:10).
 - “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:6).

John's statement to his disciple that *the wrath of God abides on* the one who walks in disobedience applies to the one who has believed on Jesus and has eternal life. Those who are born again have the indwelling Spirit, and with it an inexhaustible ability to serve. However, it is still a matter of choice for each person whether to walk in obedience to the Spirit of God, or whether to walk in our own way. When we walk in our own way, apart from God's ways, we gain God's *wrath*. The word *abides* is present tense. The emphasis is that when we choose sin, we gain its adverse consequences, which abide upon us in the present.

Paul explains how this operates in his letter to the Romans. He tells us that when people turn from God, and follow their own ways, God's wrath is revealed by God giving us over to our desires. He gives us to our lusts, which become addictions, which lead to a debased mind (Romans 1:24,26, 28). God's wrath is giving us over to our own flesh. James says something similar in his epistle, telling us that all temptation comes from within our own selves, out of our own "lust." When we give ourselves over to our own lust of our flesh, sin is conceived, comes to gestation, is born, grows up, and becomes death (James 1:15).

In Galatians, Paul covers this same point, describing a basic choice each believer in Christ has each moment, which is whether to walk by the Spirit or by the flesh. The fruits, or results of the Spirit are to live and experience an abundant life ("zoe"). To see in our daily lives the fruits of the rebirth we have been given. On the other hand, if we sow to the flesh, we reap corruption (Galatians 5:13-25; 6:8).

This is the same basic approach God took with Israel. He chose Israel as His people. They are and always will be His people (Romans 11:2, 26). Nothing they could do would, or will separate them from His love. Even when God sent them into exile by giving them over to the Babylonians, God's intent for them was wholly benevolent (Jeremiah 29:11). As with believers in Christ, God emphasized with His people Israel the importance of their choices.

God set before Israel blessings for obedience, and cursings for disobedience. As with New Testament believers, most of the cursings were the natural consequences of sin. God promises immense benefits for Israel if they would walk in His ways, doing what they knew in their hearts to be right. Moses sets this forth clearly in Deuteronomy 30:11-20. Paul used this same passage as an example of what "righteousness which is by faith" looks like in Romans (Romans 9:30; 10:6-8).

Having enough faith to believe on Jesus on the cross, hoping for healing gives us new birth. This is a great gift we possess forever. But the prize of life, the experience of abundant living ("zoe") depends on obedience. In setting forth this principle in Chapter 3, John has shown the path to fulfill his rationale for writing his gospel, which is:

"...but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

The "these things" are the things John included in his gospel. He chose what he wrote to accomplish two things:

1. To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
 - To do this requires only enough faith to look at Jesus on the cross, hoping on His death for us to save us from sin and separation from God.
 - John makes clear in Chapter 3 that simple faith is all that it takes to gain the gift of eternal life.
 - This great gift is unconditionally given.
2. To “have life in His name” through a lifestyle of “believing.”
 - John has introduced the concept to us that the great prize of life comes by walking in obedience. John the Baptist instructed his disciples in this manner.
 - To experience “life in His name” is conditional. It depends on whether we walk in obedience. Jesus told us in verse 21, that “he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”
 - Those who have been reborn have a choice: walk in faith, believing God’s words are true, and receive the promise of experiencing “life in His name”—or not. And miss out on the greatest blessing available in this life.

With this chapter, John provides a succinct summary of the basic proposition of his gospel. He makes clear that there is a gift of eternal life to be received by faith, and a great prize of experiencing “life in His name” through the obedience of faith. John gives us this through Jesus’ testimony to a ruler of the Jews, and through John the Baptist’s explanation to his disgruntled disciple.

Biblical Text

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 a